



**DELHI UNIVERSITY  
LIBRARY**

**DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

Cl. No. 0142:3M0P:1 11164.

Ac No. 173068 25 Date of release for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below. An overdue charge of 06 nP. will be charged for each day the book is kept overtime

---



## SNOW PEOPLE



IALKI ODULOK

# SNOW PEOPLE

BY

TAEKI ODULOK

*Translated by JAMES CLEUGH*

WITH 10 PHOTOGRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY THE AUTHOR



METHUEN & CO. LTD LONDON

*36 Essex Street W.C.*

*This translation first published in 1934*

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

## *INTRODUCTORY NOTE*

**T**AEKI ODULOK, the author of this tale of a tribe of Chukchee, the Siberian cousins of the Eskimo, inhabiting the remote Arctic coast bordering on the Bering Straits, is himself a member of the neighbouring tribe of Yukagirs. He took part in the Russian civil wars after the Revolution of 1917, fighting for the 'Reds', and since 1925 has studied in Leningrad. He has already published several works in Russian dealing with the Far North.

The present story is set in the period just prior to the War, since when the life of the Chukchee has been transformed under the influence of the Soviets.



# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MOON PUTS ON HIS FURS .	1
II. THE SHAMAN BLOWS : . .	16
III. A MAN IS BORN . . . .	26
IV. AFTER THE SNOWSTORM . .	42
V. TRACKS IN THE SNOW . . .	53
VI. COMPANY IN THE 'TUNDRA'	63
VII. THE NEIGHBOUR'S ARRIVAL	77
VIII. THE TENT IS FOLDED . .	85
IX. A HERD OF TENTS . . . .	93
X. BIG RUSSIANS . . . . .	104
XI. KUTUWJA CLIMBS UP TO THE SUN .	127
XII. YOUR FATHER WAS A GREAT MAN .	140

## ILLUSTRATIONS

TAEKI ODULOK . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
CHUKCHEE WOMEN WITH CHILDREN .	8
ENTRANCE TO A TENT . . .	8
THE LEATHERN BUCKET . . .	18
CHUKCHEE WOMAN . . .	20
TATTOOED CHUKCHEE WOMAN .	50
THE TRAIN HALTS	88
THE FURRY SWADDLING CLOTHES	88
CHUKCHEE MAN . . .	93
AN OLD CHUKCHEE ESKIMO	150



## CHAPTER I

### THE MOON PUTS ON HIS FURS

**S**NOW everywhere. A man striding over it. Near him reindeer moving about. They are burrowing in the snow, burying themselves in it till nothing can be seen of them but antlers and tail. They are feeding on moss.

The man began to count his herd. He took off his mittens and bent one after another of his fingers inwards. He pointed to one of the reindeer and bent his thumb. Then to a second and crooked his forefinger. At last he had bent all his ten fingers. But all the reindeer had not yet been counted. There were more of them than he had fingers on his two hands.

The man sat down in the snow, pulled off his boots, made of undressed leather, and continued his counting of the reindeer on his toes. When he had finished he drew a line in the snow and said. 'One man.' But there were more reindeer in the herd than the man had fingers and toes. He counted a second time on fingers and toes, made a second line in the snow, and said: 'Two men.' But even then there were still

more reindeer to count. The man made a few more lines in the snow, added one short line, then a vertical one, and said: 'Three men, one man I've already counted, then half a man, a child, two eyes and a nose as well. That's all the reindeer I've got'

His toes had been freezing as he counted. One of his little toes was quite white already. The man rubbed his toes with snow. As soon as they had become flexible again he put on his boots, stood up, and remarked:

'All the same, I'm somebody, I am I —Imteurgin—don't need help from any one, not even from Ermatschyn. That's the sort of man I am!'

Some of the reindeer had meanwhile lain down and buried their heads in the snow. Imteurgin ran up to one of them, gave it a kick in the ribs, and said:

'No sleeping! You'll freeze if you do. Go on burrowing in the snow and crop moss!'

The reindeer stood up reluctantly and continued their burrowing in the snow.

Imteurgin walked about among his herd, noticed how tired the reindeer were getting, and observed compassionately:

'You poor brutes! I don't know how it is you don't break your finger-nails off doing all that!'

He gave a start of fear at his own words. The ill-omened speech might pierce the animals like a lance. He knelt down and

began, like them, to burrow in the snow. As he burrowed he shouted:

'I'm a reindeer! I'm the leader of the herd! I'm not afraid of the snow, and I'm not afraid of foot-rot either! That's the sort of reindeer I am!'

He looked at the reindeer, then at the snow, and said:

'Human reindeer aren't afraid of ice. Their finger-nails are made of iron, their antlers of copper, and their eyes of fire. Foot-rot is terrified of them, it doesn't dare go near them; it runs a long, long way off. Yes, indeed!'

He snatched out his knife, raised it high over his head, and shouted:

'I strike to kill! I tear with my antlers! I gore the wolf I slaughter foot-rot. I slit the itch's belly open! That's what I do! Off with you, don't you dare come near!'

Then he muttered, staring in front of him

'That's better. Now I've driven away the evil spirits'

The man calmed down, seated himself in the snow, and filled his pipe. The tobacco was blended with fragments of dried and powdered mushroom. He drew at his pipe, coughed, spat, and looked up at the sky. Red fire was blazing in it.

'Like blood,' the man thought. 'The people up there are making bonfires; it must be cold They're warming themselves.'

He inhaled the tobacco smoke deeply and coughed again. When he next looked at the sky, pale green flames were burning in it.

• 'Like ice in spring,' he thought. 'The people who make the red fire have gone, that's sure.'

Suddenly the green fire flashed across the sky, turned fox-colour, like an old she-bear, and then assumed its green gleam again.

'Just like reindeer liver,' the man exclaimed, with a start of fear. 'Those are evil spirits for sure, *kaels*. They're running about up there and putting different coloured furs on.'

As the last of the Northern Lights went out the moon rose. Its light was reflected in the antlers and hoofs of the reindeer.

'Good,' said the man, putting his pipe away in the breast of his leather jerkin. 'That's the sun's brother. The *kaels* are afraid of him. That's why they've all hidden themselves. I wonder where they've gone to. I expect they've come down to the earth.'

The man glanced round him, looking first to the right, then to the left. Nothing to be seen. Deep snow only lay everywhere, far and wide as the eye could see.

The moon was now surrounded by a white ring.

••  
'The moon is putting on his furs,' the man remarked.

Suddenly a metallic, crunching sound became audible in the snow. Light footsteps approached. It was his son, Kutuwja.

'Father,' he said, 'there's game about near here. It's *kaalwylu*' (wild reindeer)

The father threw up his head, ejaculating: 'Quick! Let's drive the herd up to them.'

They drove the herd out into the *tundra*<sup>1</sup>. The reindeer moved slowly, halting continually and pawing at the snow. Then the leader stepped forward, snorted, and lifted his tail high.

The other reindeer too raised their heads and ran suddenly into a group behind the leader. A long distance off, in the *tundra*, five wild reindeer were standing close together. They had long legs, thinner than those of the domesticated species, lighter hides, and white, sharp antlers. Wild reindeer whetted their antlers on trees and on stones in the ice.

The herd surrounded the wild reindeer. The leader sniffed at the foremost beast. The others too began to make the acquaintance of their wild cousins. Meanwhile Imteurgin crept forward and threw his *tschawut*, a lasso made of reindeer-skin, over the antlers of the biggest of the wild reindeer.

The animal snorted, lowered its antlers, and sprang at Imteurgin. It was a close shave for Imteurgin. The beast might have



slit open his stomach with its antlers, tossed him, and then mercilessly trampled him to pulp.

• But the son was just able to throw his lasso over the reindeer's antlers and pull the animal towards him. Father and son then began to tug the beast to and fro, winding the lassos around their bodies and gradually approaching their victim.

Soundlessly, in order not to frighten the other reindeer, they crept up to the snared animal. Then the father drew his lance and hurled it. Blood spurted from the reindeer's haunch, it staggered and sank to the ground. The two men leaped forward on to the animal, seized it by the antlers, and plunged their knives into its neck. Then they drank the blood as it gushed out, the father drinking first, then the son. When they had drunk their fill they pressed ice into the wound; for the blood must not be wasted.

They left the animal lying on the snow and stealthily approached the others. The father concealed himself behind his own reindeer and threw his lasso. He now had a second animal fast by the antlers. The son's lasso caught the beast round the legs. Together they threw it down in the snow and stabbed it to death.

In this way they slaughtered all five reindeer.

Then they drove their herd back to the

tent, loading the dead animals on to their baggage-sled.

A dog crept out from under the tent-flap, sniffed at the slaughtered beasts, and licked up the blood.

Two women, bending double, came out of the low entrance to the tent, which had a reindeer-skin hung across it. One of the women was middle-aged, the other young. A little girl followed them.

The men and the women between them dragged the game into the tent. It was pitch-dark there. The older of the two women crawled behind the *poronga*, a rather low partition composed of reindeer-skins, and came back carrying the skull of a reindeer, filled with liquid fat, in which a lighted lump of moss was floating.

She placed the skull on the bottom of an inverted kettle, and by the light of the burning moss the whole family applied itself to cutting up the animals. The men skinned them, the women removed the flesh and bones.

As soon as this operation was over the feast began.

They ate the liver, drank the blood, and sucked the marrow of the bones. The reindeer were fat and tasted good.

'That does a man good,' exclaimed the father, tossing back his black hair and laughing. His whole face was smeared with blood. Only the teeth shone white.

'God Wayrgan has given us meat—good meat. You shall have a share too, Wayrgan!'

The father placed a piece of brain in the lamp. Then he took a small alder twig, forked at the end, out of the bosom of his leather jerkin. That was the god Wayrgan. He had two legs like a man, but he had no head and no arms.

'Wife, give him something to eat!'

Imteurgin's wife smeared Wayrgan with fat and blood and held him for some time over the fire. Then the father wrapped him up in a short thong of leather and put him away again in his jerkin.

'Sleep now,' said the father. 'My stomach is warm now.'

The family undressed, crawled behind the curtain, and lay down to sleep. Kutuwja alone remained on his feet. He went outside to guard the reindeer. He did not come into the tent again until it was nearly morning. His hands were trembling.

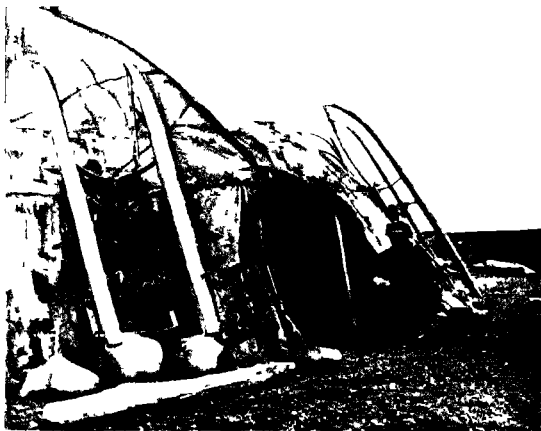
'There are wolves about,' he said. 'They are watching our reindeer. It's bad, that.'

'Yes, it's bad,' the father agreed. 'Harness a *chorongo*' (a reindeer used for travelling) 'as quick as you can!'

Imteurgin put on his jerkin, buckled on his knife-belt, took a lance, a stick, and his lasso, and went out of the tent. He seated himself on the narrow sled, letting his legs hang down on each side of it, and put the



CHUKCHI WOMEN WITH CHILDREN



ENTRANCE TO A ITNI

IN A SINGLE TENT OF THIS TYPE FROM TWO TO THREE  
FAMILIES USUALLY LIVE

reindeer in motion. The animal started off at a gallop. In turning, Imteurgin had continually to use his legs as a brake, so as not to capsize the sled. He soon overtook the wolves. There was a whole pack of them—perhaps six or seven. They were running in single file, their tails pressed between their legs. Suddenly they stood still and showed their teeth. The reindeer gave a jump of terror, springing to one side and nearly overturning the sled. Imteurgin brandished his lasso and threw it over the head of the biggest of the wolves. The lasso made a smacking sound as it fell. The wolf gave a convulsive leap backwards, gnashed its teeth, and then sprang to one side. The noose of the lasso tightened, and the wolf began to be dragged along behind the sled. The other wolves jammed their tails between their legs, arched their backs, and made off. Imteurgin pulled up his reindeer. He hauled in the lasso and felt the wolf's body. It was dead. Its head could be turned in any direction. The neck was broken. He felt the head again, and gave it a blow with his stick to make sure. Then he put the wolf on the sled. He wanted to go after the other wolves after this, but the reindeer was reluctant. Its jaws gaped, and it coughed. It wanted to go home.

Imteurgin turned the sled. Next day he again drove out into the *tundra* to set up

*utkutschins*, traps with bone teeth and twisted reindeers' tendons instead of springs.

On the way he noticed tracks. Some small animal had passed. It looked as though some one had been poking holes in the snow with his fingers. The animal had run a little way, micturated, and run on; then micturated again. It had lifted its hind leg at every hummock.

'Fox,' was Imteurgin's comment.

He pulled up the reindeer and touched the tracks. They were still soft. He touched the yellow spot where the fox had lifted its leg. The urine was still not frozen. Imteurgin jumped back on the sled and sent the reindeer on at full speed. He soon overtook the fox. Its white pelt was almost invisible against the snow. Imteurgin reached far out of the sled with his stick. But the blow went astray. The fox ran back. Imteurgin turned his reindeer and went in pursuit. He caught up the fox and sprang off the sled at it. The animal merely showed its teeth and then dived into the snow.

Imteurgin poked about in the snow; but the fox had escaped. Then he caught sight of three black points—the two eyes and the muzzle. Imteurgin had no sooner recognized them than the fox jumped high into the air and ran off. He reached the frozen snow and looked round. Then his brush went up and he raced off and away.

'*Ga-ka-ka!*' Imteurgin cried, throwing his cap on the ground angrily. Then he picked it up again and went back to his reindeer.

But the reindeer was no longer there. It had run away.

'God is in a bad temper. He didn't let me catch the fox, and now he's driven my reindeer away.'

Imteurgin followed the tracks of the reindeer. He grew hot. He picked up a handful of snow and ate some of it. But he still sweated. The skin of his clothing stuck to his body, tickling and pricking him. He unbuckled his belt and carried it over his shoulder. Cold air percolated to his body from beneath. He was not so hot now. He followed the tracks for a long time. The moon rose and went down again. Now it was sinking for the second time. Imteurgin ran on and on.

'You get on quicker with reindeer than with your own legs,' was Imteurgin's comment as he caught sight of his tent. He crawled behind the partition and slept right on till the next rising of the moon. When he woke he asked his wife:

'Did the reindeer come back with the sled?'

'Yes. It came back soon after you had driven away.'

Imteurgin harnessed the same reindeer

again and tweaked its ear. 'See here, don't you run away from me any more. We're going to go and look at the traps now'

The reindeer merely shook its head and snorted.

'I'd better take the dog with me too,' said Imteurgin to his wife. 'I let the fox get away last time. Sew breeches on the dog. Otherwise its belly'll freeze'

The woman took a skin and a large needle and began to make breeches and an apron for the bitch. The animal was big and grey and looked like a wolf. The hair had disappeared from its belly and the red nipples were bare. It would soon pup.

As soon as Imteurgin had smoked his pipe through, his wife had finished her work. She called the bitch, drew the skin breeches over its hind legs, and tied them securely over its back with a thong. Then she drew the apron over the animal's head as far as its belly and made that fast too, in the same way, over its back. The dog ran across the snow, lurching and hobbling. Imteurgin picked it up, placed it next him on the sled, and tied the animal securely to his belt, so that it could not fall out on the way. The reindeer set off over the frozen snow at a fast trot. The moon was quite low in the sky. It stood almost directly above the peak of the tent.

'Clear weather to-day. Not a single cloud



in the sky,' said Imteurgin to the dog. 'We shall be able to see the tracks well'

The dog sat behind him, propping itself securely on the sled with its forefeet, and panted down the back of his neck.

Imteurgin pulled up the reindeer at the first trap.

The spring, of reindeer's tendon, was loose. The foxes had eaten all the bait and got away. The teeth of the second trap were stained with blood. Imteurgin beamed. He inspected the tracks: a wolf had been there. The teeth of the trap must have pierced its head. Then it had torn itself free and run round in a circle, always in the same direction.

'He lost his right eye, that's certain. That's why he always turned right,' Imteurgin thought.

He followed the tracks. Just here the wolf had sprung to one side, then run straight on again, turned round, and gone in a circle once more, keeping in one place. Imteurgin could no longer make out the sense of the tracks. He got back on to the sled and looked round him. There was something dark lying over there in the snow. He drove the reindeer towards it. The dark spot moved and made off. It was the wolf! He was not running very quickly. He kept his head at an oblique angle and bore continually to one side. Soon he came quite

near, right in front of the reindeer's feet. The reindeer kicked him with his forefeet and knocked him over. The sled drove on over him and crushed him down into the snow.

Imteurgin looked back. The wolf was still moving. He turned the sled round again, drove over the wolf a second time, and gave him a blow on the head with the stick. The wolf's feet twitched, then he was dead. Imteurgin seized him by the tail and threw him on the sled. The dog snarled and bit the wolf's ear.

On the way back Imteurgin came across a fox. He let the dog loose in an instant. The animal sprang from the sled, but became entangled in its breeches and fell to the ground, its nose buried in the snow. Imteurgin reached out with his stick. The fox gnashed its teeth and sprang with a single bound on to Imteurgin's shoulder. The latter made an attempt to avoid the leap, but bent too far over the side of the sled and fell into the snow with the fox, whose jaws held him fast by the collar.

Imteurgin, as he lay, seized the fox by the tail. The fox let go of his collar and bit him in the hand. At the same moment the dog ran up, leapt at the fox, and throttled it.

Imteurgin pulled the fox away from the dog, inspected it all over, and threw it on to the sled beside the wolf.

'A good pelt that fox has. That means a new teapot for me,' said Imteurgin. He drove the reindeer back to the tent.

The moon had entered its ring again. The wind was stirring up the snow in gentle spirals.

'The moon is putting on his furs,' said Imteurgin. 'There's a snow-storm coming, then. Good thing my tent's quite near now. There go my reindeer, and there's Kutuwja, too, standing there.'

## CHAPTER II

### THE SHAMAN BLOWS

As though in answer to his words the snow whirled up and began dancing in the whistling wind.

'The Wind is blowing, he's making wind' Imteurgin spoke aloud, staring in front of him. He pulled up the reindeer and called to his son. 'Kutuwja, we must take care the Wind doesn't blow us down or bury us in the snow. Quick, let's drive the reindeer in!'

They counted the reindeer and herded them towards the tent

'*Hei, hei!*' they shouted at the reindeer.

The animals moved in the required direction at an easy pace. Suddenly they caught sight of something large and dark on the snow. It was broad at the bottom and tapered up to a point. They threw back their antlers, put up their tails, and shied. Then they lifted their heads, looked again at the object, and snorted.

A smell of smoke came from the large dark object. It was the tent. The reindeer did not recognize it. They had forgotten it overnight. The whole herd started back in

terror and ran out into the *tundra*. Imteurgin and Kutuwja had difficulty in turning them back. The reindeer moved forward over the snow with hesitant steps and examined the tent with suspicious, fearful glances.

The leader, a big grey reindeer, marched at their head. His antlers quivered like a barren alder on his head. Suddenly he gave a fierce snort and aimed his antlers straight at the tent. In another moment he would have tossed it into the air, carried it away on his antlers into the broad *tundra*, trampled it into pulp there under his hoofs, and torn it to pieces with his antlers.

'*Hei!*' a woman cried suddenly at him from inside the tent. 'Don't you be so naughty, grandpa!'

She ran out of the tent with a leathern bucket in her hand. She was dressed in furs, a one-piece tunic, and trousers.

'Here's a drink for you!' she called, and shot the contents of the bucket full of urine straight at the reindeer.

The leader, with a start, planted his forefeet firmly in the snow and licked them greedily. The other beasts, smelling the human urine, ran to the leader, hustling into a solid mass, and began to lick him and the place where the urine had been spilt.

At the same moment the men crept stealthily up to the herd. They dragged off

a lean reindeer by the feet, seized it by the antlers, and stabbed it. They pressed ice into the wound so as not to waste the blood.

They did the same with two more reindeer.

'Father,' Kutuwja said, 'perhaps this much meat will be enough to last us during the Wind '

'Who can tell?' answered the father in a meditative tone. 'Just now it is the month of the "Stubborn Old Bull". Next will come the month of the "Lean Meat". The Wind will blow for a long time yet.' He reflected for a time, and then observed: 'Last snow-time we killed five reindeer. That was not enough. We went hungry. We'd better stick a knife in one more of them '

They stabbed another reindeer.

'That will be enough, won't it?'

The father looked at the reindeer. He looked at their antlers, which quivered when the reindeer cropped their moss, and at their shaggy tails. He was sorry for them. He nodded to his son.

'Yes, that will be enough '

He wiped the sweat from his face with the sleeve of his furred jerkin. A strong gust of wind suddenly blew from the direction the night came from. It tore the leather cover from the tent, whirled it round, and threw it with a smacking sound on to the snow. The women ran after it, seized it, and



TIL LEATHERN BUCKFT

stretched it across the sloping cross-beams of the tent again, fastening it with thongs. They tied the loose ends of the thongs to the reindeer antlers which stuck out of the snow near the tent.

The head of the family nodded approvingly.

'It'll hold now,' he said. 'It won't come loose again now.'

The wind was driving thick masses of snow over the *tundra*. It blew chill flakes against the men and animals, blinding them and preventing them from breathing. The men crawled into the tent and buttressed the bottoms of its leathern walls from within with the bulky carcasses of the dead reindeer so as to prevent the walls of the tent from being torn up by the wind.

The family laid aside their furs and crawled into the inner part of the tent. All five—the father, the mother, the little daughter, the son and his wife—sat down in a circle round the lamp, on their beds of reindeer-skins.

Above the lamp hung a copper teapot with dented sides and a piece of tin nailed across the hole where the spout had been. The teapot was filled to the brim with snow, and the family were waiting until the snow melted so as to be able to drink it. They leaned their heads against the furry skin of the walls of the inner part of the tent and sat wedged against one another in a circle,



naked. In the centre of the circle stood a wooden bowl. They dipped their bone spoons into the bowl and sipped the reindeer blood, which was mixed with raw pieces of liver and kidney, chopped small.

The snow-storm beat against the roof and walls of the tent. The frozen leather shook and groaned in the wind.

'Where's the dog?' asked the little girl

'Let it in.'

The little girl raised a corner of the curtain. That was just what the dog had been waiting for. It crept in at once and joined the family.

'Look, he's all snowy!' said the little girl. She brushed the snow off the dog's shaggy coat with her spoon, then she licked the spoon clean and went on eating.

While the teapot was warming the father lay down on his reindeer-skin and went to sleep. Suddenly he began to toss to and fro and mutter incomprehensibly. The little girl pressed herself close to her mother and whispered anxiously:

'You ought to help father. I'm sure he's fighting the Wind.'

She put her hands round the dog's neck and thrust it forward with its nose towards the father's feet.

'Quick, help father! He's fighting the Wind!'

The dog sniffed at Imteurgin's feet and



••

CHUKCHEE WOMAN IN TYPICAL DRESS  
ONE-PIECE TUNIC AND TROUSERS

tore away a piece of dried mud from one of his heels.

The father gave his leg a jerk and woke.

'*Hach!*' He gave a loud sigh. 'I've had a frightful dream.'

The daughter gave him a timid look and nestled once more close to her mother. Father Imteurgin put his pipe in his mouth, uttered a slight cough, and began to tell them his dream

'I went into the woods to look for stakes to dry our meat on. I chose a tree without branches, one that would make up well into a tripod. I bent it down and was going to cut it when I noticed I had left my knife and axe at home. I flew into a passion, and began to tug at the tree to pull it out of the ground. But the tree stuck fast and wouldn't come out. Soon I was exhausted, and lay down. I looked round to see if I could find a weaker tree. Then I suddenly saw something. Behind a thick tree Old Man Bear was sitting, sucking his paw. I thought to myself, "I'm sure he's hungry." And I got an awful fright. I threw myself on my stomach and crawled away. The thorns in the bushes scratched my face and hands badly, but I crawled on and on. I crawled among some hummocks that rose out of the water and stretched myself out quite flat. I lay quite deep in the water with only my head looking out.

“Now the bear won’t know whether it’s a hummock or my head,” I thought.

‘I crawled on and on. Then I took a careful look round. The bear was no more to be seen.

‘So the Old Man had gone.

‘I straightened up, still looking round, however, and, hiding myself behind the trees, ran home. Suddenly a twig snapped in front of me and I glanced up. Good heavens! The bear was running right at me. He was coming from in front of me. He was red all over like fire. How thin he was, too. His guts were quite dried up. His belly was shrunk right up to his backbone.

‘Oh, I was certain he was going to eat me up!

‘I doubled back. The bear was after me. Smash! That was his paw catching me from behind. I fell on my back. He got on to my chest, and seized my neck in his teeth. He nearly bit it through. Good job I woke up!’

‘What an awful thing!’ Kutuwja said. ‘If only I had known, I would have put a lance or the axe into your hand.’

‘A pity you didn’t,’ the father said, wiping the sweat from his forehead.

‘In future, before you go to sleep, always have your lance near you.’

‘Quite right, Neusskat. That’s what I’ll do.’

Imteurgin’s wife spread out a sealskin on

the ground, covered it with a board, and set out five wooden bowls. She poured warm water into the bowls and placed some pieces of frozen meat on the board. They nibbled the meat and drank the warm water with it. Neusskat took a large piece of the meat and put it into the dog's mouth. Suddenly the little girl called out:

'Mother, father, little dogs have come!'

She turned round, seized something in both hands, and held it out to her father.

'*Kaakkume!*' the father exclaimed in astonishment. 'Just like a dog'

He stroked the new-born puppy, then wrapped it up in a skin-cushion and gave it to his wife.

'Give the guest something to eat.'

But the puppy would not eat anything and only whined. The woman took it and put it back next the bitch.

Night was over. The family had had their sleep out and got up. The bitch now had four little ones.

'Well,' said the father, 'now we'll just see which of them is the strongest.'

He crawled out of the inner part of the tent with Kutuwja. They put on their cold and prickly fur jerkins and trousers and tried to get outside. But they could not lift the walls of the tent. It was covered with snowdrift to the very top. A heavy weight of snow hemmed it in on all sides.

'Ah!' the son said, 'the snow's blocked up the tent. The Wind's driven up all that much snow.'

'Yes, that's the way of it,' said the father. 'We shall have to bring the snow into the tent.'

When there was a great pile of snow in the tent the father fetched the four puppies and stuck them all deep in the snow. They just whined and disappeared into the loose heaps of snow. The women came out of the inner part of the tent and bent over the heaps 'Why don't they crawl out?' asked Neusskat.

Then first one and then another of the puppies struggled out of the snow, using their noses and forepaws. The little girl picked them both up and put them inside her tunic to warm them.

'Brrr,' she shuddered. 'How cold they are!'

It seemed that the other two were not going to come out.

'They're gone,' said the father.

'Yes,' commented the son, 'they're dead.'

The men brushed the snow away and lifted up two little lumps. Kutuwja shook the snow off the frozen puppies and said:

'Their paws are like sticks and so are their tails. And their noses are quite white. They're frozen.'

One of the women fetched a piece of meat

out of the inner part of the tent, cut it into small strips, like rags, and wrapped them round the heads of the dead puppies.

'Back home with you, and eat the meat on your way,' said the father to the dead puppies. 'When you grow up come back to us. You will help us to live and protect our herd from the wolves. Come.'

Then father and son buried the puppies deep in the snow and crawled back into the inner part of the tent.

### CHAPTER III

#### A MAN IS BORN

‘WIFE,’ said Imteurgin, ‘we shall have to cut some more thongs and plait a cover for the sled. We shall soon be able to get on the move again.’

The woman produced a large sealskin.

‘Perhaps we can make some thongs out of this?’

Her husband examined the skin and replied:

‘Yes, we shall be able to get some good thongs out of that once we’ve got the hair off it.’

He tugged at the hair with his teeth, trying to pull it away, but the hair stayed where it was.

‘We’d better put it in the bucket.’

The woman rolled up the skin and placed it in the leathern bucket, which stood in a corner of the inner part of the tent. The whole family used this bucket as a chamber-pot.

The skin was left in the urine for three days. Every day Imteurgin fished it out with a stick and examined it to see whether the hair was loose. At last, on the fourth



day, the leather had softened and the hair began to fall out.

'The hair's coming out,' said Imteurgin, nodding his head joyfully.

He spread the leather out on the bed. He and Kutuwja began to cut the thongs. The woman sat beside them and plucked out the bristles. They kneaded the thongs in their hands for a long time, and, when their hands were covered with callosities, chewed the thongs and tugged out the bristles with their teeth.

When the thongs were finished the two men and the younger woman lay down. They were all very tired. The older woman sat down in the corner, drew the reindeer skull with the moss towards her, and began to sew a bag for her child out of the hard sealskin. She sewed with reindeer tendons, making tight knots to secure the seams. As she worked she sang to herself:

Head like a bear's,  
Teeth like a wolf's,  
Skin like a reindeer's,  
Feet like a dog's!

The song referred to the child she was expecting.

Suddenly she stopped sewing and began to writhe. After a time she regained control of herself, took a reindeer-skin, spread it out with the hair undermost, and lay down on it.

It was her confinement.

Imteurgin put out the light, so that the evil spirits might not be able to see the child, and dashed out of the inner part of the tent. A bundle of bones, feathers, and shreds of skin hung on one of the walls. He seized the bundle, waved it above his head, and began to turn round and round in a circle, bawling:

'My heart's jumping! It wants to fight! It wants to kill! We're stronger than any one! Off with you, *kaels*! My heart's leaping. It wants to kill!'

He capered, shouting at the top of his voice. He bellowed like a bear, howled like a wolf, bayed like a fox, and croaked like a raven. He was driving away the evil spirits, keeping them at a distance from the tent, so that they might not harm the child which was coming into the world behind the partition.

Kutuwja, too, came out of the inner part of the tent and began to drum on the frying-pan with his fingers. He was helping his father to expel the *kaels* from the tent.

They were both bellowing so loud that at first they did not hear the crying of the new-born child.

'Is it a boy or a girl?' asked Imteurgin.

'A boy,' answered the woman behind the partition.

Imteurgin started dancing again, flourishing

his bundle of bones and feathers. Kutuwja, too, spun round in circles.

The tent shook to the rattle of the bones, the clatter of the pan, and the piercing cries of the two men.

Then the noise ceased. Imteurgin sat down in front of the partition and let the sacred bundle with the wolf's teeth, the bear's ear, the wolverine's muzzle, the fox's tail, and the raven's feather slide through his fingers.

From time to time Imteurgin thrust forward a claw or a tooth into the darkness, so that the spirits would not even dare to come anywhere near the tent.

The wind raged round the tent, whirling up the snow. It seemed to Imteurgin that a whole swarm of evil spirits was scratching at the leather walls.

The woman lifted the curtain of the partition and handed the child to its father. He took it in both his hands, held it out in one direction after another, and cried.

'There is my lance, there is my hammer, there is my knife. I strike all things to kill! Out with you, *kaels*!'

As Imteurgin raged about the tent his wife emerged, drawing on her clothing of skins. Then she took a wooden drill from a leather bag and began to twirl it round in a hole made in a thin board. She was making fire.

The woman twirled the drill for a long time. Her hair became frosted. It grew quite white. Steam rose from her bare neck and breast. Suddenly there was a smell of smoke and the tent grew a little lighter. A flame shot up at the end of the drill. The woman threw a handful of dry shavings on to the board. When they blazed up she carried the burning wood behind the partition and lit the *askaj* (the lamp).

'There is a new fire lit,' she said.

'A new fire!' Imteurgin cried. Then at last he carried the new-born child out of the cold outer part of the tent into the warm interior.

The younger of the women, Kutuwja's wife, stuffed the kettle full of snow and hung it over the lamp. Then, while Imteurgin's wife soothed the child, she fetched frozen reindeer haunches from the outer part of the tent, cut them up small, and placed them on a sealskin. The family ate the meat in honour of the new-born infant and discussed the question of naming it.

'Let us call it Kuch, like its mother,' Kutuwja's wife advised.

'No,' said Neusskat. 'Let us call it by your name, Rultu.'

'It ought to be called Imteurgin, like its father,' was Kutuwja's proposal.

'That's right,' agreed the father. 'Imteurgin is a good name. It's brought me a lot

of luck. I have reindeer, I have a tent, my wife sits at my fireside, my children help me.'

So the boy was called Imteurgin.

Next day Imteurgin asked his wife:

'Are the tongues done yet?'

'No,' answered his wife. 'Rultu has been cooking them the whole night, but the meat is still raw.'

She fished the reindeers' tongues out of the kettle and placed them on the sealskin. Imteurgin took the largest tongue, put it in his mouth, and cut it through skilfully, close to his lips, with a sharp knife. Clotted blood flowed over his hand as far as his elbow.

'Yes, the meat is still raw,' he observed, licking his fingers. He began to eat it.

The others, too, started eating. There was no sound in the inner part of the tent but the loud smacking of their lips.

After the meal Kuch and Rultu gave every one a cup of a reddish infusion made from dog-rose berries. The cups were made of clay and painted in bright colours. Russian merchants had brought them a long time ago. They were now much cracked and even broken. The thrifty owners had mended them with small thongs and stopped up the holes with mud.

'The teapot is too small,' said Rultu. 'I didn't make enough tea.'

'Pour some water into it out of the kettle,' Kuch advised her.

Rultu filled the kettle with the thick gravy from the reindeers' tongues and poured the turbid liquid into the cups.

'The water's gone quite bad,' Kutuwja said. 'It's quite bitter. Pour me out another cup.'

When they had all drunk their fill Imteurgin announced:

'Listen, now. I'm going to tell you a story of the old days.'

Kutuwja and the woman settled themselves comfortably to listen. Kuch gave the child the breast to keep it quiet.

Imteurgin spat on his hands as though about to begin work, cleared his throat, and started his tale.

'There was once a woman who had three children

'She said:

' "I'm going out now to pick berries."

'She went off. While she was picking her berries she suddenly heard some one call out:

' "I say, come here, will you?"

'She turned round. There was a *kael* standing there. She was frightened.

' "How many children have you got?" asked the *kael*.

' "Three," answered the woman.

' "What is your husband's name?"

"The woman answered:

"My husband's name is Kakanka."

"Go back home," said the *kael*.

The woman went home and told her husband:

"There's a *kael* about."

Suddenly a voice called out:

"Kakanka's children are grown up!"

"Aha, that's the *kael* shouting," said the husband. "I'll just sharpen my little knife."

The voice came nearer and sang out:

"Ah, ah! Kakanka's children have got big. Now I shall have good liver to eat!"

The voice came quite close to the tent.

"Kakanka!"

"Well, what's the matter?"

"Give me one of your children!"

"No, I won't give you any of them!"

"Right, then I'll eat *you* up!"

The *kael* opened his mouth wide and swallowed the whole tent and all the people in it.

"Ha, ha! I've eaten you all up."

"Yes, you have," came Kakanka's voice from inside the *kael's* belly. "But we like it very much inside you here. It's lovely and warm!"

"Is that s-o-o?" said the *kael*. "Then I shall throw you all out."

He bent down and spat out the tent again and all the people in it.

'As soon as Kakanka had got out again he stabbed the *kael* in the neck with his sharp knife.

' "Oh, oh! My neck hurts!" shouted the *kael*. "Throw me the children out of the tent. I'll smear the wounds with their fat."

'Kakanka fetched his bucket. The *kael* swallowed the bucket, urine and all.

' "Ah, you've cheated me, have you? You just wait!"

'Kakanka laughed.

' "Ha ha ha! What do you think you can do to me?"

'The *kael* got very angry and shouted:

' "I'm crawling in now behind your partition!"

' "Crawl away, then," said Kakanka.

'The entrance to the tent was only a very little one. The *kael* could only just stick his nose in. He couldn't get his head in at all. The *kael* put out his tongue and tried to get at the people inside.

'Kakanka got some fire and burnt the *kael's* tongue.

' "Oh, oh!" shouted the *kael*. "My tongue's on fire!"

'Then he said:

' "I'm going to sleep. I'm tired."

'The *kael* lay down in front of the tent and went to sleep. ••

'Kakanka made a circle of wood all round him and lit a big fire.



'The *kael* cried out in his sleep:

' "Oh, it's hot! Kakanka, put out the fire!"

' "Wait a minute," said Kakanka. "Open your mouth. I'll throw one of my children into it."

'The *kael* opened his mouth wide and waited.

' "Shut your eyes!"

'The *kael* closed his eyes tight.

'Kakanka took a burning log and stuffed it into the *kael's* mouth

' "Oh, oh, I've burnt my mouth," said the *kael*, bursting into tears. Then he asked Kakanka:

' "What are you laughing at me for?"

' "Because I've just killed you."

' "What do you mean, killed me? I'm still alive. Here, I'm going to eat you up right away!"

' "No," said Kakanka "You're dead. Off with you into the sea "

'The *kael* picked himself up out of the fire and went away over the *tundra*, weeping.

' "Kakanka's killed me. However shall I be able to eat children's livers now?"'

Imteurgin told many other fairy-tales to pass the time more quickly.

But the snow-storm did not abate. It raged, whirling, round the tent, blockading the people inside with snow.

Since the beginning of the snow-storm Imteurgin's family had lain down to sleep and got up again several times.

Once Imteurgin woke up, roused his wife, and said:

'Give me a light I want to smoke.'

'There isn't any more fire,' answered Kuch. 'There's no more fat left.'

Meanwhile the child had woken up too and burst out crying Neusskat too woke up and started crying as well.

The children screamed in the tent and the wind screamed still louder outside It had piled a whole mountain of snow on top of the tent The roof yielded under the weight of the snow and bulged inwards and downwards The inner part of the tent grew smaller and the atmosphere suffocating

Imteurgin tried to sit up, but knocked his head against the roof.

'Ha' The *joronga* has got quite low What shall we do now?'

No one answered.

He slipped quietly out of the inner part of the tent, dressed, threw the bundle of claws and animals' teeth over his shoulder, and lifted a corner of the wall of the tent. He then tried to stretch his hand outside; but there was a hard wall of snow in front of the tent. Imteurgin lay down on his stomach and began to dig a hole through the wall of snow. He piled up the snow he

dug out inside the tent. Then he put his head into the hole and burrowed his way on like a stoat. About two paces from the tent he emerged again.

Whirling snow lashed his face. He was just about to take the sacred bundle from his shoulder when a strong gust of wind blew him down and rolled him down the hill over the snow-heaps. Imteurgin struggled back with some difficulty and thrust his legs into the hole from which he had just emerged. He slid down it, and then lay with his legs in the tent and his head in the snow. He took the raven's claw from the bundle, clasped it in his hand, and muttered to himself:

'Up with you, my raven, fly at the *shaman*, pick his eyes out! Strike through his skull, eat up his brains!'

But the words did not help. The wind raged on and made the tent shake. Then Imteurgin held the wolves' teeth out and cried in a louder voice:

'Wolf, bite the *shaman's* legs off! Bite through his throat and make him stop blowing on us.'

The wind howled so loudly that Imteurgin could not hear his own voice. He gasped and seized hold of the bear's foot in the bundle.

'Grandfather,' he shouted at the top of his voice, 'strangle the *shaman*, eat up his heart,

and make him stop blowing on us; make him stop sending his Wind!’

But the bear’s foot did not help either.

Imteurgin, pressing against the snow with both hands, crawled back into the tent. He shook the snow off himself like a dog, crawled behind the partition, and said:

‘The Wind’s blowing from all directions at once. He refuses to leave off. It’s a bad business!’

He shook his head and lay down on the bed of skins.

‘Mama, the snow’s falling on us,’ called out Neusskat suddenly. She began to cry. ‘I’m cold!’

Kuch felt about in the darkness and said:

‘The bed’s all covered with snow’

She took little Imteurgin, laid him on her stomach, and drew Neusskat towards her. Soon Neusskat too went to sleep again.

Suddenly snow-flakes began falling into the tent. Kutuwja sat up and ran his hand over the curtain of the partition.

‘The partition is just like ice. We shall have to clear it.’

The family left the inner part of the tent and put on their cold clothes. Then they beat the ice-covered skins with mallets made of reindeers’ antlers.

When the coating of ice had been removed they hung the skins from a thong stretched horizontally from one end of the

tent to the other and sat upon heaps of old clothing.

It was very cold in the tent. They buried their faces in their fur collars; but these too very soon became covered with ice.

'Mama,' Neusskat cried out, in tears, 'some one is putting snow down my neck.'

'Oh, this is terrible,' the mother moaned in terror. 'Who can have stolen into our tent, then?'

'That's the snow from her collar,' answered Imteurgin out of the darkness. 'It's falling down her neck of its own accord. The snow wants to warm itself too.'

'I'm hungry,' came Kutuwja's voice from the other end of the tent.

'There's nothing to eat,' the mother answered. 'The food is all finished.'

Silence ensued. Only the wind howled, blowing frost through the openings in the walls of the tent.

'We'll put up the partition again now,' said Imteurgin at last. 'It's cold.'

They all rose to their feet.

'The partition is just like ice,' came Kuch's voice. 'It's just as though some one had been sprinkling it with water.'

They all felt the partition. Its edge was as hard as wood.

'It won't bend at all,' said Rultu. 'What shall we do now?'

Silence fell again. Nothing could be

heard but the sound of Neusskat sucking her frozen fingers.

Kutuwja announced:

'We shall have to beat it out somehow or other.'

'No,' answered Imteurgin. 'We shall have to bury it in the snow. Ice melts quicker in snow.'

They buried the ice-coated skins in the snow just outside the tent.

'Mama,' Neusskat cried out, 'my fingers are hurting!'

'Come here to me,' said Imteurgin.

He undressed her and placed her inside the breast of his jerkin.

The little girl stayed quiet for a time. Then she began wriggling her legs, and called out from inside her father's jerkin:

'Oh, I can't breathe!'

Imteurgin unfastened his belt. Neusskat put her head out under the lapel of his jerkin and gasped for air. Then she went to sleep.

Soon Imteurgin too was asleep. A little later Kutuwja woke him and asked:

'Shall we put the partition up again now?'

Imteurgin burrowed in the snow and felt the skins.

'No. The ice isn't melted yet.'

The family sat for a long time dozing, their faces sunk in their frost-covered collars. When the frost fell on their necks they woke

up, shook it off, and went to sleep again. They did not get up till the ice on the skins buried in the snow had melted. Long icicles, like reindeers' ears, hung from the skins. They removed the icicles and the small fragments of ice from the skins and hung up the curtain of the partition again.

'Lie down and go to sleep immediately,' said Kuch 'It is dark, and we are all very hungry'

They all lay down on the skins and huddled close to one another

## CHAPTER IV

### AFTER THE SNOWSTORM

THEY slept for a long time. So long that Imteurgin's back froze. He was lying close to the frost-hardened wall of the tent, and suffered more than any of the rest from the cold. He tried to move away from the wall, and cried out suddenly at the top of his voice.

Kutuwja and the women woke up. The women were so frightened that they did not dare to stir.

Kutuwja asked in a low tone:

'Whom are you killing, father? Shall I help you?'

'No. I'm not killing any one. My head is frozen to the wall,' answered Imteurgin, groaning.

Kutuwja and Kuch felt over Imteurgin's head in the dark and attempted, with their united strength, to tear his long hair loose from the wall. Imteurgin bellowed with pain.

'Don't shout so,' said Kuch. 'You'll wake the child up.'

Imteurgin became silent. He shook his liberated head and felt over it with his hands.



'My hair's got quite short.'

Then he felt his ears.

'My ears are frozen too. Can you hear the wind, Kutuwja? I can't hear anything.'

Kutuwja listened. But just at that moment the child began whimpering loudly.

'Aha!' exclaimed Imteurgin, pleased 'My ears are warm again. I can distinctly hear the child crying.'

'Yes, the child is crying,' said Kutuwja. 'It's crying so loudly that I can't hear the Wind any more.'

They all became silent and listened. Nothing could be heard but the crying of the child.

'Don't cry,' said Imteurgin to the child. 'You listen too.'

Again they fell silent. Again they listened excitedly. Nothing could be heard except the still louder crying of the child.

Imteurgin felt about on the skin of the bed. He found the child's mouth and held it shut with his hand.

'Now we can listen better.'

The child kicked wildly.

'Hold his legs tight!' called out Kutuwja. 'He makes such a noise with his legs that we can't hear anything.'

Imteurgin grasped the child's legs and held them tight, but just then Neusskat woke up. She too broke out into loud weeping.

'Little squealer!' scolded Imteurgin, removing his hands angrily. 'Let's go out,' he suggested to Kutuwja.

Imteurgin and his son crept out of the inner part of the tent. The latter turned his head from side to side. Silence. They dressed.

Kuch gave the child the breast and Rultu drew Neusskat close into her arms to quieten her. The women put their heads out from behind the partition.

'Can you hear anything?' they asked the men.

'No,' was Imteurgin's answer. 'The Wind has stopped. Now we can live again.'

The women sprang into the cold outer part of the tent, the naked children in their arms, and began to dance for joy.

'The Wind's stopped! The Wind's stopped! Now we shall have meat! Now we shall live!'

'Father,' Neusskat called out, 'bring me back some liver and brains. I want to eat.'

'Right; we'll go and collect the reindeer. Then we shall have liver and brains and everything.'

He lifted up one of the walls of the tent and began to force his way through the snow with his fur-gloved hands. He crawled out, tottered, and fell to the ground.

Kutuwja crawled out behind him. He

could not see his father in the darkness and called:

'Father' Where are you, father?'

The father made no reply.

Kutuwja, in a fright, turned his head in one direction after another and then bent down to look for tracks.

'Kutuwja, Kutuwja!' Imteurgin's voice suddenly resounded from somewhere down below.

Kutuwja grubbed in the snow with his hands.

'Where are you, father?'

'Here Where are you?'

Kutuwja rushed in the direction of the voice, stumbled against his father, and fell with his head in the snow. The father helped him out of the snow-drift and they sat down beside one another.

'This was how it was. I crawled out of the tent and started to breathe quickly. Suddenly the snow gave way under me and I fell down Then I heard you call. But I didn't know where you were calling from.'

'Let's go on,' said Kutuwja.

'Sit still My head's going round in circles.'

'And my chest feels all dark,' Kutuwja remarked. 'My heart is jumping up and down.'

'That's because we were sitting behind the partition so long. Well, we'll go on now.'

They stood up and stamped on the snow to find out whether it was deep.

'Shan't we lose our way? I can't even see my feet in this darkness.'

'No, we shan't get lost. It's the month of the "Frozen Udder" now. It'll get light soon.'

He disentangled his lasso, tying one end of it to his belt and giving the other to his son.

'Tie it round you tight.'

Kutuwja fastened the end of the rope round his body, then, after testing the strength of the fastenings, they went out into the *tundra*.

The father did not make very good progress. He kept sinking down into the snow and slipping. His son stumbled against him and also continually fell down. They rose, shook the snow off, and went on.

'However are we going to find the reindeer?' asked Kutuwja.

'We shall have to look for them everywhere. They may be somewhere quite near, of course.'

They found harder snow and went forward more quickly.

Suddenly Kutuwja slipped and fell full length on the smooth snow. The lasso tightened and pulled Imteurgin backwards. The latter threw up his hands and fell to the ground on his back.

'Snow's hard,' he said. 'That's bad.'

The reindeer may have run a long way off.'

Kutuwja approached his father, sank down beside him, and exclaimed:

'It's difficult going, father. And dark. Hadn't we better wait until it gets light? Then we shall be able to look better.'

'No. We must go on looking now. We must go on looking as long as we have any strength left. Perhaps we shall be able to find them.'

He rose and walked on heavily. Kutuwja followed him, holding the rope tight.

Several times they stood still, then lay down on the ground and listened. They hoped to be able to hear the snow crunching somewhere or the sound of the reindeers' hoofs.

But the *tundra* was as still as death. The only noise was the crunching of the snow under their feet and the whistling of their breath in the air.

'I wonder where the reindeer have got to?' Imteurgin reflected. 'They would be lying down so long as the Wind blew. Now that it has stopped they are sure to be cropping moss. They must be hungry.'

'Father,' called out Kutuwja suddenly, 'I can hear a dog barking.'

'Where?' Imteurgin took off his cap so as to be able to hear better. 'You're right. There is a dog barking. There must be a man there, then—a stranger.'

'Let's go and find him,' Kutuwja suggested.

'I don't know whether we'd better. A man living near us who has never once paid us a visit? He must think we're bad people. We can't very well go to him, then, can we?'

'He might know where our reindeer are and tell us.'

Imteurgin kept silent for a time, stamped about in one place for a little, and finally agreed.

'All right, let's go to him, then.'

At that moment a white pillar of fire shot up in the sky. It blazed out and disappeared. Then from all sides red, blue, and green flames darted into the sky. They chased one another, merged into one another, disappeared, returned, and shone more intensely in the heavens. The snow assumed the most varied colours and seemed to move. Imteurgin and Kutuwja shut their eyes tight. They had grown unaccustomed to light.

After a time they opened their eyes, looked round, and stared at a spot where a streak of green light was lying. It was a high hillock.

'His tent's blocked up with snow too,' said the father.

He walked all round the hillock with his son, squinting anxiously at it. Kutuwja crept cautiously to the top of the hillock.

and listened. A sound of hollow barking came from somewhere beneath him.

'Shall we go in?' he asked.

'We'd better clear away the snow first,' answered his father.

He lay down on his stomach and began to dig up the snow with his hands. He had soon hollowed a large hole, into which he crept head first.

His son watched. The head and the hands soon disappeared, then the shoulders and back. The furry trousers and feet alone remained sticking out of the snow. At last only the feet in their boots of black reindeer-skin could be seen. Then they too vanished. The father had quite disappeared into the snow.

Suddenly the feet reappeared. Imteurgin crawled backwards out of the snow. He was completely white. His head, hands, and face were all covered with snow.

'Why did you crawl back?' asked Kutuwja.

Imteurgin shook the snow off.

'I burrowed in the wrong place. You dig now.'

He indicated with his foot the place for Kutuwja to dig.

The latter lay down on his stomach and began to throw up the snow. Then he crept into the hole he had made. His father followed him. Kutuwja felt round the stiff leather wall of the tent, under the snow, and tugged at it with all his might.

Then he and Imteurgin crawled into the tent on all fours.

The dog rushed at them, barking loudly. 'Father,' Kutuwja shouted, 'the dog's jumping at my throat.'

Imteurgin seized the dog by the tail and dragged it away.

A dazzling light shot through the hole behind the two men.

Imteurgin stared at the ice-coated wall of the partition. There was a bundle of bones and feathers hanging over it, together with a folded lasso, a fur jerkin, and a pair of worn-out fur trousers.

Imteurgin started back, seized his son's sleeve, and whispered:

'Those are my trousers. However did they get into the stranger's house?'

Kutuwja drew close to his father in terror and said:

'There's our teapot too.'

Then a young woman came out from behind the partition. Thin black plaits of hair dangled on her shoulders and down her back. Her nose and chin had blue stripes painted on them.

Kutuwja's knees shook. Terrified, he waved the apparition away with his hands and shouted:

'My wife stayed at home. You're not my wife. Down with you into the ice. You're not to look at me!'





The woman craned her neck, her eyes starting out of her head.

Kutuwja gave a shrill scream and rushed to the door of the tent.

'Hold him tight!' cried another woman. 'Catch hold of his legs and hold him tight!'

The woman with the plaits seized Kutuwja by the legs and dragged him back into the tent.

Kutuwja gave a loud shriek.

'Oh, let me go!'

Imteurgin's whole body trembled. He wanted to bolt.

Then a little girl sprang from behind the partition. Her black hair was rumped. A fox's tail hung round her neck.

The little girl seized Imteurgin by the trousers and cried:

'Did you bring the liver with you?'

Imteurgin made a convulsive movement with his legs. The little girl clung still closer to his trousers and began to cry.

'Give me the reindeer liver. I'm hungry!'

Imteurgin stroked the child's hair, burst out laughing, and spoke to his son, who was lying on the ground in the middle of the tent and defending himself with hands and feet against the two women and the dog.

'Kutuwja, it's our own house!'

Kutuwja jumped up, stared at his father, then at his mother, then at his sister Neuskat, and said:

‘How ever on earth did we land here?’

‘Probably the house followed us. Let us go to bed. To-morrow we can make a fresh start. Perhaps we shall find the reindeer.’

Kutuwja pulled off his clothes, which were thickly covered with snow. Imteurgin bent over him and said in a very low tone, so that neither the women nor the dog could hear:

‘We shall see to-morrow. Perhaps our house really did stay in its old place.’

## CHAPTER V

### TRACKS IN THE SNOW

**I**N the far distance something dark was descending on the snow. It was the sky. There were holes in it, and twinkling lights shone through them. Those were the stars. There was something big and white moving among them. That was the moon.

'The sun's brother is travelling round the sky,' said Imteurgin, pointing to the sky with his finger. 'He gives us light.'

'And where has the sun got to?' asked Kutuwja.

'The sun is asleep. Soon she will wake up again, and then we shall have more light.'

Father and son had come out of the tent while they were talking.

Then Imteurgin said:

'Kutuwja, let us just try and see where it was we came home from yesterday.'

They struck off diagonally, following the tracks they had made the day before. The tracks began at the entrance to the tent, went round it in a circle, and then returned again to the entrance.

'We were running round in a circle all

yesterday, and got back in the end to our own house again,' said Imteurgin, laughing.

Kutuwja remembered how frightened he had been of his own wife the day before, and had to laugh too. Suddenly he seized his father's arm.

'Look, father, there's something black running over the snow yonder.'

'Where do you mean?'

Imteurgin turned his head in one direction after another and said:

'Take a good look at it. Perhaps it's our reindeer.'

'There! There goes one!' called Kutuwja. 'Look! How funny it seems, not at all like a reindeer, it's so big; fat below and thin on top. And it's covered with things like long tufts of hair.'

Imteurgin opened his eyes wide, but he could see nothing.

'Is it running towards us or away from us?' he asked

'It's running along there, on the horizon, where I'm looking.'

'There's ice on your eyes. Perhaps you're only looking at the ice.'

Kutuwja brushed the little particles of ice from his eyelashes and eyebrows and looked round him.

'Perhaps I only saw the ice. But perhaps it was *kaels* too. I can't see anything now.'

They went forward a few paces. Then Kutuwja, terrified, called out again.

'What are you shouting for?' his father asked him.

'I saw something black again. You were right, father. The ice clings to the hair of my eyes, and then I always see something black on the snow.'

They wandered about the *tundra* for a long time. But there was not even a scratch to be seen on the ice. The snow lay clean and even, licked smooth by the wind.

Imteurgin squatted down.

'It looks as though the end of the world has come. How ever are we going to live without reindeer?'

'Suppose we go to our neighbour Karawja and get some meat from him?' proposed Kutuwja.

'Karawja's tent is over there, a long way off. You would have to go to sleep five times before you reached him.'

They rose once more and walked on into the unfamiliar part of the plain. Suddenly Kutuwja sprang backwards, shouting:

'Reindeer have been this way!'

Imteurgin ran up to his son, sinking knee-deep in the snow at every stride, and bent down.

'Those are our reindeer.' The one with the big antlers has been this way. He always throws up the snow with his antlers.'

Imteurgin snatched off his cap and followed the tracks at a run.

'And the one with the crooked foot's been this way too. Look here! One footprint's always apart from the rest.'

Kutuwja bent over the tracks of the crooked foot.

'The reindeer have been rooting up moss here too.' Imteurgin pointed to big holes in the snow. 'And the one with the coloured foot has made water here. She doesn't like to make her feet wet and always spreads them wide apart.'

Imteurgin and Kutuwja moved about over the tracks, turning over the snow disturbed by the hoofs, the fragments of dung, and the frozen urine. They wanted to see whether it was long since the animals had passed.

'We shall be able to live now,' Imteurgin said to Kutuwja. 'The herd must be in the neighbourhood.'

They hurried on, but suddenly stood still.

'A stranger!' they both exclaimed at the same moment, and bent over the tracks to see better. 'He had snowshoes on. He's been driving our reindeer!'

'He must have been a well-fed fellow,' Kutuwja observed. 'His tracks are deep ones.'

Imteurgin said nothing. He took off his cap again and wiped the sweat from his face.

Then he stared keenly ahead. There was nothing to be seen. He turned round and saw something moving.

'There are the reindeer!'

Imteurgin and Kutuwja knelt down, snorted like reindeer, and crept on all fours towards the herd.

The reindeer heard the snorting, drew close together, and elevated their tails. Then they stretched out their noses and walked slowly towards the little animals in reindeer-skins.

Imteurgin and Kutuwja stopped and began burrowing in the snow. Then they made water and ran to one side on all fours.

The reindeer sniffed the urine and licked the damp snow voraciously, thrusting one another aside to get at it.

'Look! What a few reindeer there are I wonder where the rest are'

'I don't know,' said Kutuwja. 'I can't see any of them anywhere. I'm sure the stranger's taken them.'

Imteurgin inspected the little herd of reindeer and shook his head.

'The leader's not there, the one with the big antlers Nor is the one with the coloured foot, the crooked-footed one, nor Black-back, nor White-breast, nor Red-eye. There are only a few left. They'll scarcely last us another Wind. How ever shall we be able to live?'



'We shall have to chase the stranger!' Kutuwja said. 'He's taken our herd. Let's catch him up and recapture the reindeer from him.'

'Off we go, then!'

They ran forward in the tracks of the snowshoes. Suddenly Imteurgin halted

'I'm sure it was rich Ermatschyn. Those are his tracks. He's a heavy man, and the thongs on his snowshoes have no knots. He's sitting in his tent at this moment, eating our reindeer and feeding his women. His tent is full of people. They're certain to kill us as soon as we arrive. It will be better to wait for Karawja and then go there together.'

'Why should they want to kill us? All we want to do is to get our reindeer back. We'll tell Ermatschyn, "Our herd strayed during the Wind and mingled with your reindeer; we followed their tracks and came to you".'

'No,' Imteurgin answered 'Ermatschyn has an evil eye and an evil hand. He has also a weapon that shoots iron balls. As soon as he sees something black in the *tundra* he takes aim at once and lets fly. Last snow-time he shot our neighbour Mitschirgin. Mitschirgin was driving his reindeer in this direction and Ermatschyn shot him down and took the reindeer away from him.'

'And what happened to Mitschirgin's old woman then?' Kutuwja asked.

'His old woman was left alone and starved to death. Then she turned herself into a wolf and throttled Ermatschyn's reindeer at nights. Then Ermatschyn hid himself one night in the snow and watched for the wolves with his weapon. When the wolves came near the herd he shot the old woman.'

Imteurgin and Kutuwja stood for a time in silence and then turned back to the reindeer.

'How shall we be able to move on?' asked Kutuwja. 'There are only so very few reindeer left.'

'Karawja will help us. He is a good neighbour. We will take him with us when we move.'

While Imteurgin and Kutuwja were away looking for the reindeer the women lifted one of the walls of the tent and began to cut away the snow with long knives made of bone. They cut away the snow piece by piece and piled it up in the tent. In this way they cleared an entrance. When the tent was filled with snow to the roof the women went out, looked at the moon and the stars, and breathed the cold, bright air greedily. Then they shovelled a narrow corridor between the masses of snow and brought the snow out of the tent. At last they got the passage clear and carried the bed-coverings and all the skins they had out into the *tundra*.

'Now they'll dry properly,' said Kuch.

Neusskat too ran out of the tent and began to turn somersaults in the snow.

Then she went back into the tent and picked up the little puppies in her arms. The puppies' hair was still very short and their eyes were dim. They whined, struggling with their paws, and buried their noses in Neusskat's leather tunic.

The child pressed them against her cheeks, stroked them, and put them back again next to their mother.

'Neusskat,' Kuch called, 'come and play with the baby.'

Neusskat ran out of the tent, seized the little Imteurgin who was swaddled in skins, and rolled him in the snow.

'There are the reindeer!' cried Rultu suddenly. 'Our reindeer!'

Neusskat jumped in the air for joy and called out:

'Father will give us liver and brains too! How lovely!'

She tried to lift up her brother to let him, too, see the reindeer, but slipped and dropped him on the ground.

The baby struggled in the snow and began to scream.

'Don't scream like that,' said Neusskat. 'Father will give you some liver too.'

The reindeer came steadily nearer. As soon as they had got quite close to the tent

they turned round and tried to bolt. But Imteurgin and Kutuwja seized the ends of the lasso, stretched it tight, and cut off the reindeer's retreat.

'What few reindeer there are,' said Kuch. 'Where did you leave the others?'

'Our reindeer are part of Ermatschyn's herd now. He took our best reindeer away and only left us the smallest.'

The women burst into tears.

'May our reindeer choke him!' they cried furiously. 'May his fat belly burst and the reindeer come back to us!'

'He has left us so few reindeer,' said Imteurgin. 'Less than a man has toes and fingers. How shall we be able to live now?'

The women did not answer. They wiped away their tears and began to make a snow-man with a fat stomach and short legs. When they had finished the figure they placed it in front of the tent.

'That's Ermatschyn!' they cried, pointing to the snow-man.

Imteurgin reached for his lance and ran Ermatschyn through the body.

'That's one for you! I've stuck you through the guts so that they can't eat up our reindeer.'

Then he drew his knife and cut off Ermatschyn's legs.

'Now you've got no legs. Now the reindeer will run away from you and come to

us! And you won't be able to catch them up!"

'Ermatschyn hasn't got any legs now! Ermatschyn hasn't got any legs now!' chorused the women. 'The reindeer will come back to us!'

CHAPTER VI  
COMPANY IN THE 'TUNDRA'

THE snow-storm had ceased. It grew quiet in the *tundra*. Towards morning the edge of the dark sky began to clear, and by the time it was day the tracks of wolves, foxes, and even rats could be seen on the snow.

From time to time the family heard whirling and whistling sounds. Swarms of white grouse were rising from the snow-drifts. All through the storm the birds had been lying beneath the snow and were now hunting for the *tundra*-berries hidden in the drifts.

The three months of night were coming to an end. The sun would soon rise.

One day, when half the sky was bright and the other half still dark and covered with stars, the crunching sound of sleigh-runners could be heard far out in the *tundra*.

'Father,' said Kutuwja. 'Father, people are coming.'

Imteurgin listened and said:

'Run home and tell them to cook a meal. There are people coming.'

Imteurgin took off his cap, pricked up his ears, and muttered:

'I can't hear hoofs. Strangers are coming, with dog-sleighs.'

He drove off his herd and went home.

The whole family was collected in front of the tent waiting for the arrival of the guests.

'*Poo-poo*,' rang out a voice clearly in the frosty air.

'They're not our own people,' said Im-teurgin. 'They're not reindeer-men, they're dog-men. *Poo-poo*, that's the way they call to their dogs.'

Two teams of dogs appeared over the top of the snow-drifts. On the second sleigh sat an undersized man with broad shoulders, swathed from head to foot in fleecy furs; on the first a tall spindle-shanked man in a worn-out fur jerkin. The lean man continually jumped off his sleigh, ran beside the dogs, and drove on the laggards. Then, running at full speed, he would seize the curved wooden cross-piece which is fastened to the middle of a dog-sleigh, balance himself on one leg on the narrow runner, and rush on.

As the teams neared the tent the dogs of the foremost sleigh suddenly snarled, dragged the sleigh round, and made a dash at the reindeer.

The reindeer shied, tossed their antlers back, and ran off.

'*Brrr, brrr*,' bellowed the lean man, thrusting an iron clamped stick into the snow

between the runners. The sleigh made a shrill sound on the snow and came to a halt. But the dogs turned back, tore the stick out of the snow, and dashed on. The lean man seized the cross-piece with both hands, capsized the sleigh, and threw the iron clamped stick at the foremost dog, hitting it in the middle of the back.

The dog collapsed at the feet of the others.

The whole team started back and came to a halt. The rear dogs sent frightened glances at the leader, which was lying still with upraised paws.

The lean man sprang at it and gave it a kick. The dog showed its teeth. The lean man turned the team round and drove back to the tent, dragging the injured dog along with the rest. A red trail showed behind them on the snow. Blood dripped from the dog's muzzle.

'Oh, look!' cried Neusskat. 'He's spitting blood; he can't get up. Oh, I am sorry for him.'

The team of the second sleigh suddenly leaped high in the air, threw the occupant out, and dashed off with the capsized sleigh. The stout man shot to one side like a discarded glove.

'Serve him right,' exclaimed Kutuwja, emphasizing the words with a stamp of his foot. 'I hope he breaks his ribs. He shouldn't whip the dogs like that.'



Imteurgin, however, said nothing. He hastened to the assistance of the old fellow.

Meanwhile the lean man had reorganized his team and prepared to follow the dogs that had bolted. He caught them up, seized the driving-rein, and tied it tight to his own sleigh. Then he drove his team back.

On the way he used his whip on the dogs without mercy, especially on the hindmost. They howled and tried to protect their heads under the driving-rein. Blood spurted from their nostrils and jaws.

'What a brute the man is; he'll kill them if he's not careful,' said Kutuwja to his father.

'Don't talk so loud,' Imteurgin answered. 'You mustn't say anything unpleasant before the guests.'

He dusted the snow from the furs of the stout man, supported him by the arm, and led him to the tent. As soon as the stout man had undressed, little Neusskat drew close to her mother and whispered in a terror-stricken voice:

'How awful he looks. What a hairy face he has. I'm frightened of him.'

Kutuwja glanced at the stout man with a similar feeling of terror.

'The hair on his face is quite red, like an old she-bear's. Perhaps he is a bear.'

He was already making for his lance. But his father seized him by the arm and said:

'He's not a bear. He's a dog-man. They

have lots of those barking beasts, dogs. They travel about on sleighs with them.'

'Look, look!' cried Rultu, pulling at Kuch's sleeve. 'His eyes are quite white. I'm sure they're frozen.'

They all stared hard at the grey eyes of the bearded man. Imteurgin asked him:

'I think your eyes are frozen. Can you still see with them?'

The bearded man did not answer. He put out his tongue, pointed to his ears, and shook his head.

There was a noise outside. The lean man dashed in, got down on all fours in the middle of the tent, placed one of his hairy mittens behind him like a tail, threw up his head, and began to bark like a dog. Then he pointed to his wide-open mouth and shouted in his own language:

'Our barkers are hungry. They want something to bite. Quick, let's have some meat.'

Imteurgin looked at him. Then he looked at his son. But he said nothing. He only wiped the sweat from his face.

The lean man seized his arm and pulled him out of the tent. Then he pointed to a dog that was sitting just outside the tent, indicating its muzzle and its stomach, and said again in his own language:

'Very hungry. Give meat. Belly's all small.'

Imteurgin sweated still more, loosened his collar, and ran back into the tent.

'Kutuwja,' he said to his son in a low tone, 'I think he wants meat to feed the dogs.'

'We haven't any meat,' said Kutuwja. 'We're going hungry ourselves.'

'The guests must be entertained,' replied Imteurgin, 'even if we do go hungry. Fetch a reindeer.'

Kutuwja picked up the lasso reluctantly and went towards the reindeer.

The bearded man drew a tobacco pouch from the pocket of his trousers and gave Imteurgin a fill from it. Imteurgin filled his pipe, took a pull at it, and passed the pipe to his wife. The latter pulled at it, spat on the edge of the bed, and gave the pipe to Rultu. Rultu blew the smoke through her nose and gave Neusskat the pipe. Neusskat took the wet stem of the pipe in her mouth and sucked at it. Then she began to cough, wiped away the tears which came into her eyes, and placed the pipe in little Imteurgin's mouth. The child hit out all round him and burst out crying. Then Neusskat inhaled a little of the smoke, bent down, and blew it into the child's mouth. The child struggled, shutting its eyes, and began squalling. The bearded man watched it, laughing.

At the same moment a large bundle made

its appearance in the tent. It was carried by the lean man, who was holding it in front of him, his back bent.

Neusskat gave another start of fear and hid herself behind the partition. The adults stretched out their necks, staring, while the bearded man opened the bundle. First of all he took out a few lumps of sugar and distributed them to Imteurgin and the women.

Imteurgin ground the sugar between his teeth and smacked his lips.

'Very good; creeps down your throat of its own accord.'

'That's one of the Tsar's dishes,' said the bearded man, smacking his lips too. 'I got it from the Tsar's town as a present.'

Imteurgin did not understand what the bearded man said and asked, in his own Chukchee dialect:

'What do you say?'

The bearded man, however, did not understand Chukchee any more than Imteurgin understood him. He was a Russian. Guest and host only knew that to smack the lips meant that a thing tasted good and that to spread out the arms meant 'a lot'.

The bearded man spread out his arms, nodded his head at his bundle, and said:

'I have many goods with me. I am a merchant, a Russian merchant. This man

here is my servant, he is a Cossack. We travel about the *tundra* trading.'

Glimpses could be caught in the bundle of black cakes of pressed tea, shining copper vessels, and the hairy paws of white and red foxes.

'I give you tea and tobacco and you give me foxes and skins. That's good trading.'

Then he took a big icicle out of the bundle and shook it under Imteurgin's nose.

There was something gurgling in the icicle. Imteurgin was quite astounded. How ever could water gurgle in ice? How was it it didn't freeze?

He had never seen a bottle before.

'That is the Tsar's water. You must have heard of the Tsar. He is a great man—a very great man. And this here'—the bearded man stroked the bottle lovingly—'is Tsar's water. It's the only kind of water the Tsar drinks—strong water.'

Imteurgin did not understand a word. He only saw the hairy man's red tongue move in and out between his bearded lips.

Kutuwja dragged the bleeding carcass of a reindeer into the tent. Its belly was slit open. Its head dangled. He cut it up skilfully and threw the still smoking meat to the dogs. Then he came back into the tent.

'I've fed our guests with meat.'

The merchant gave Kutuwja a piece of

sugar too. Kutuwja turned it over in his hand, sniffed it, and licked it. Then he thrust it into his mouth and began to suck it.

'The stone tastes good,' he remarked.

When the guests had drunk their fill of tea, Kuch boiled some meat and laid it on a flat piece of leather.

Then the merchant reached for his icicle and struck it against his palm. Something shot out of the icicle. Water was spurting out.

The merchant filled a cup with it and said to Imteurgin:

'Try a sip of the Tsar's water.'

Imteurgin sniffed the contents of the cup, shut his eyes, and began coughing.

'Oh, it's bad water; it's just like fire.'

The thin man smacked his lips.

'Try it.'

Imteurgin drank a little and shook his head.

Kutuwja took a sip, drew a deep breath, and passed the cup to his mother. Kuch swallowed a little, said something in a hoarse voice, and gave Rultu the cup. Rultu closed her eyes and drank some of the liquid. Then she screwed up her face, spat the water out, and passed the cup to Neusskat. Neusskat looked at Rultu, then at the cup, then at the water. Then she raised the cup cautiously to her lips.

'It bites,' she said, and poured the rest of the liquid into the baby's mouth. The baby rolled its eyes, opened its mouth wide, and stiffened. The Cossack slapped his thighs with delight and gave a shout of laughter. The merchant laughed too.

'Mother,' said Neusskat, stammering a little, 'why have my brother's eyes suddenly gone white?'

'I expect it's the bad water,' answered Kuch, as though asleep.

'Mother,' Neusskat cried, 'the water wants to come out again.'

Her mother was not listening to her. Neusskat tottered to and fro in the tent, then bent down and lowered her head to the ground. Then she was sick.

The adults, too, felt dizzy. Imteurgin alone suddenly began to feel cheerful and to rock himself to and fro, singing.

'Hairy guest, hairy guest! His face is all covered with red hair like an old she-bear's. He has little pieces of ice in his eyes. He's had his eyes frozen, the hairy guest.'

'Host'—the merchant tugged at Imteurgin's sleeve—'let's start our trading.'

Imteurgin lifted his head.

The merchant laid out various objects on the bed: knives, beads, biscuits. Then he took a fox's skin out of the bundle and dangled it under Imteurgin's nose.

'Give me something like that,' he said.

Imteurgin moved slowly over into the corner and took a fox's skin out of a bag, then a second, then a third.

'More!' cried the merchant, winking at the Cossack. 'More!'

The Cossack ran out of the tent and fetched in a teapot made of red copper with a long spout, a plump, shining kettle, and a few brightly painted tea-cups.

Imteurgin thought of his dented teapot with its patched-up spout and of his tea-cups which were nothing but broken pieces held together with leathern thongs. He nodded his head in sign of agreement and shook out of the bag all the skins he had taken that whole winter.

The merchant bent down and hastily shuffled the skins together.

There were twelve white foxes, five red foxes, and six wolves, with long, dark pelts.

*The merchant smiled in his moustache* and began to pack the skins carefully into his bundle, smoothing out each one with cautious attention as he put it away.

'Let's have another drink of the Tsar's water,' said he, and poured out a cup full.

Imteurgin closed his eyes and tipped the whole of the contents of the cup into his mouth. Then his head sank on his chest and he went to sleep.

The merchant gave a quick glance round



him. The women were lying with their faces on the bed of skins. Imteurgin was sitting motionless in his place. Kutuwja was squatting with his legs folded under him and staring at the merchant. The latter pressed a cup full of vodka into his hand. Kutuwja seized it in both hands and drained it, without setting it down once.

'Well, young man,' said the merchant, 'just take a look behind that cushion. Perhaps there's a silver fox or a blue fox hidden there. I'll give you a whole bottle of Tsar's water for it.'

Kutuwja did not reply.

Suddenly he jumped up, ran out of the tent, and began to stuff his mouth full of snow. Then he came back into the tent, staggering, and collapsed on the ground like a dead man.

Imteurgin came to himself first. His head ached, and there was a curtain of grey mist before his eyes. He stood up, then sat down on the bed and said:

'Guest, give me some more water.'

The guest did not reply.

Imteurgin rubbed his eyes. It was dark behind the partition. Snore resounded from the bed.

He went out of the tent and rubbed his face with snow.

'Get up, wife, and hang the teapot over the fire. I'm thirsty.'

Kuch stretched herself and passed her hands over her face. Then she crawled out from behind the partition and began to twirl the wooden drill to kindle fire. The flames wouldn't come for a long time. Kuch's hands grew lax.

At last, after some time, she was able to light the lamp and take it into the inner part of the tent.

Imteurgin looked round. The merchant and the Cossack were no longer there.

Kutuwja and Rultu, with rumped hair and red faces, were lying on their pile of skins. Neusskat crouched, huddled, against the sleeping dog.

The baby woke and began to cry. Imteurgin put a pinch of tobacco in its mouth. The child's throat rattled. Kuch cast an angry look at her husband, picked the tobacco out of the child's mouth with her dirty fingers, and began to chew it. Then she took the spoutless teapot and hung it over the fire.

'Hang up the new pot,' said Imteurgin. 'We will drink out of the new pot to-day.'

'I don't see any new pot,' answered Kuch.

Imteurgin looked at her angrily and said:

'Look for it properly, wife. I know the new teapot's there. I bought it yesterday from that hairy man. A new kettle too, and new cups. We shall have nothing but new things now.'

Kuch looked behind the partition and then all over the tent. But she found nothing.

'I'm sure the guests took the things away with them,' she said, and went back to the fire.

Imteurgin looked round. There was nothing to be seen—neither the red teapot, nor the plump kettle, nor the cups, nor the tobacco. There was nothing but a string of shining blue and yellow beads round Kuch's neck.

And on the edge of the bed lay an empty bottle.

Imteurgin grew uneasy and ran to his bag where he kept his skins.

The bag was empty.

'The hairy man has betrayed us!' Imteurgin shouted. 'He's taken my skins and the teapot as well. He'll go and show it to some one else now and betray him too. He'll travel all through the whole *tundra* like that with my new teapot.'

Imteurgin picked up from the ground the hammer the women used to break up the reindeer's bones and banged it with all his might against the bottle. The bottle shattered into a thousand pieces.

'May the hairy man's head split like that too!' he shouted.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE NEIGHBOUR'S ARRIVAL

THE dog, rolled up into a ball, was asleep in a corner of the inner part of the tent. Suddenly it lifted its head and pricked up its ears, then it gave a loud bark and dashed out.

'*Kakko*,' growled Imteurgin drowsily. 'There's a noise outside. Perhaps the merchant has come back.'

He ran out of the tent stark naked.

'Red-haired one, give me my kettle!' he cried, then suddenly started back in astonishment.

'Is that you, Karawja?'

'*E-ee*,' came the answer of an oldish man dressed in a black fur jerkin. He was tethering his reindeer to one of the leathern thongs which stretched from the sides of the tent in all directions.

'How warmly dressed you are,' the guest laughed.

Imteurgin noticed for the first time that he was naked, and began to shiver all over. He shrank with cold and exclaimed:

'Come inside the tent!'

He scurried in himself.

'Wife,' said he, 'get a meal ready, our neighbour Karawja is here.'

Kuch woke up Rultu and her son.

'Get up, our neighbour's here.'

Karawja undressed when he was in the tent, and then crept, naked, behind the partition. First, he pushed up against Imteurgin and sniffed behind his ear, then he did the same to Kutuwja, Rultu, and Neusskat. Finally he embraced the baby.

'Sleep,' said he to the little Imteurgin, 'and get as big and strong as a bear.'

'He came during the snow-storm,' said Imteurgin, 'and two little dogs as well. Two went back again and we buried them in the snow.'

Neusskat took the puppies away from the bitch and handed them to the guest. Karawja weighed them in his hand, stroked them, pressed them against his cheeks, and gave them back to Neusskat.

'May they grow up to be like wolves. May they drive away all *kaels* and bite the foot-rot to death.'

Imteurgin filled his pipe and handed it to his guest. Karawja took a pull at it and said:

'I see you have had a visit from the merchant and he has brought you tobacco.'

'Yes,' replied Imteurgin. 'He took all my foxskins away from me, told me he would give me a teapot and a tea-kettle for them,

and then just went off, taking all my skins with him.'

Karawja took the pipe out of his mouth and looked at Imteurgin. After a time he asked:

'How many animals did you give him for them?'

'All I had; more than I have fingers on my two hands.'

'That's a very great deal,' said Karawja, shaking his head. 'And what did the merchant give you?'

Imteurgin pointed with his finger at the string of sparkling stones which his wife wore round her neck.

'That thing there, and a little tobacco—half a pouch full.'

'Half a pound.' Karawja spat.

'And a stranger drove off our herd,' interposed Kuch.

'Who was it?'

'He was a heavy man' Imteurgin said. 'His footprints were deep in the snow. And he had good snow-shoes, with one-piece thongs, no knots.'

'That was Ermatschyn for sure,' said Karawja. 'You'd better go and look at his herd. Perhaps you'll find your reindeer among them.'

'Have some meat,' said Kuch. She laid a fat piece of reindeer breast before the guest.

After Karawja had eaten he fetched a thick ham of bear's meat, quite white with fat, into the tent and handed it to Kuch. He gave Imteurgin a smoked bear's head, and Kutuwja a lasso made of four strips of white sealskin tightly and evenly plaited together. Rultu received some loins of reindeer, thick with fat, and Neusskat a big soft bearskin, black, with a silvery lustre.

'These are the presents,' Karawja explained. 'My wife and my son send them to you. And I have brought them.'

The entire family was extremely pleased with the fine presents. Imteurgin, however, felt the most pleasure. He placed Karawja in the centre of the inner part of the tent. The rest sat round him in a circle, nestling up as close as they could to him.

'We did not know a new man had arrived among us,' said Karawja, pointing to the baby, *'so I did not bring a present for him.* I will give him, instead, my reindeer-team, sled, reins, and all.'

Imteurgin seized the baby and placed it in Karawja's arms.

'Here he is, that son of ours. He has a strong voice and will be able to shout finely at the reindeer.'

Karawja pressed the child to his chest, rubbed his cheeks on its back, and said:

'Let him and my boy Atscho grow up together.'

'That will be good. Let the two of them grow up together,' agreed Imteurgin.

Then Karawja told them how his family had spent the time during the snow-storm, how he had hunted bears during the autumn, and what traps he had set for foxes.

'I haven't many more reindeer than you have,' he observed reflectively. 'Nor have I more than one son, Atscho, and you have two sons and a daughter. You live better than I do. My boy Atscho is still little. He is only two snows old. And so I would like to be your man.'

'It is good to live in the snow when the family is a large one,' Imteurgin approved. 'Your boy Atscho is a good son. Let him play with my little "Teu", Imteurgin.'

'Our son Atscho, his mother, our reindeer, our dog, and myself,' said Karawja, gazing at the lamp, 'all ask Neusskat to be Atscho's wife.'

Kuch squeezed Neusskat against her breast and made no reply.

'Neusskat,' asked her father, 'would you like to play with Atscho?'

'Yes; we'll roll about in the snow together.'

'And you, Rultu, and you, Kutuwja, would you like to have Atscho?'

'Why not, indeed,' replied Kutuwja, 'since we are neighbours?'

'And you, Kuch?' Imteurgin turned to his wife.



'Karawja is our neighbour,' his wife said. 'We have always lived together and helped one another. We will now ask him once more for his help.'

'Well said.' Imteurgin nodded approvingly. 'We go hungry these days, for we have no reindeer.'

Then he addressed Karawja.

'We are poor people. A stranger has driven off our reindeer and left us to go hungry. You did not know that. I must now tell you that we have become poor people.'

'I am not asking for riches,' Karawja rejoined. 'You are good people, strong people. If a stranger has robbed you of your reindeer, or if your reindeer have bolted of their own accord, or if wolves have throttled them, it's not your fault. It is just bad luck. Take my reindeer if you like, let us live together, if you like, and eat at one fireside. We are neighbours, are we not?'

'Let Neusskat be Atscho's wife,' declared Imteurgin. 'Let Atscho be our son.'

Kuch and Rultu cut the fresh bear's meat into thick slices and warmed up water in the old teapot. After the evening meal they all talked on for a time and then lay down to sleep.

The guest was given the warmest place in the middle of the inner part of the tent. The women lay near the lamp so as to be

able to watch the fire and see it did not go out.

They slept for a long time, and did not notice the arrival of Karawja's family in the dawn with twelve reindeer and six sleds. In front of the draught reindeer trotted a small herd of other reindeer, about thirty or forty head in all.

Inside the tent the dog barked and woke the sleepers. Karawja woke first, then Imteurgin, then Kutuwja and the women.

The children only heard nothing and remained fast asleep, as though it were still night.

The adults let the children sleep on, dressed, and went out of the tent to meet the guests.

The men helped Tyllim, Karawja's brother, to unharness the reindeer. Kuch and Rultu conducted Karawja's wife into the tent, undressed her, and took little Atscho behind the partition.

While the guests made themselves comfortable Kuch busied herself at the fire.

'Get up, Neusskat,' said Imteurgin, taking the drowsy girl by the arm. 'Your husband has come.'

Then he glanced at the child's back and scolded her.

'A-ka-ka! You've made yourself dirty again.'

The little girl burst out crying.

'No, no, I've not. I'm only wet.'

'Yes, you have,' insisted Imteurgin. He turned the child round and showed the guests her back.

'That's not so bad,' observed Karawja. 'That obviously happened while she was asleep. She's still little, you see.'

Imteurgin did not reply. He dragged the dog up to Neusskat. The dog licked the girl's back clean; then he licked the wet bed and crawled back into his corner.

Meanwhile Karawja's wife untied her fur bag and took out little Atscho. She gave him the breast and then placed him next to Neusskat on the bed of skins.

'That is your wife,' she said to him.

Atscho twitched convulsively, blew out his brown cheeks, and set up a loud and tearful howl.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TENT IS FOLDED

**I**N the morning the women took the tent down. They folded it up and laid it on a sled. The partition, the domestic utensils, some pieces of frozen meat, and all the household furniture were loaded on to the other sleds.

When everything was ready, they all got on to the sleds and the train set itself in motion.

Imteurgin led the way on a narrow racing sled. He steered it to right or left with his dangling legs. Karawja came next on another racing sled. Kutuwja and Tyllim ran behind them on snow-shoes driving the herd

The women, seated on broad and heavy baggage sleds, followed. Kuch was on the first, which was loaded with the folded tent. A second equally broad sled was attached to it. Neusskat and Teu sat in this second sled, wrapped in skins, among the big bags.

Behind these sleds rode Karawja's wife and, finally, Rultu. Her sled was laden with frozen meat and the domestic utensils and was drawn by two piebald reindeer.

A black hole now yawned in the place where the tent had been standing that morning. All round it lay the grey snow, which had been trodden down by the feet of the human inhabitants and rooted up by the reindeer.

Dark shreds of reindeer-skin, clean, gnawed bones, and black pellets of reindeer dung were strewn about.

Scarcely had the train of sleds proceeded on its journey when a raven flew up. He circled over the black hole, croaked loudly, and, spreading his wings, settled on the ground. He stood still for a while, hopped about a little over the snow, then flew towards the black hole. He pecked voraciously, on its edge, at one of the reindeer's bones which the family had been gnawing.

All day long the sled-runners swished over the *tundra* and the reindeer's hoofs beat the snow. On each side of the train of sleds rose the thick grey mist of the reindeer's breath. It drifted rearwards like a great hairy tail, sank slowly, and fell to the ground in the form of hoar-frost.

Neusskat leaned over the edge of the sled, spat into the snow, and watched the saliva, congealed to a little ball of ice in its flight, roll rearwards.

Her collar became covered with thick frost and began to prick her neck and cheeks like sharp needles. She tried to shake off

the frost, but could not move her hand. The wide sleeve of her fur tunic was stuck fast to the sled. She wriggled her shoulders, drew one arm out of the sleeve, and hurriedly brushed the snow-dust off her collar.

Then she crossed her arms over her chest and buried her hands in her armpits. The empty sleeve fluttered in the piercing wind.

Little Teu lay next to Neusskat, wrapped in leather thongs. He was still swathed in the furs in which he had been placed at his birth. These furry swaddling clothes were permanently wet, and were now rapidly freezing in the ice-cold air. They became quite hard and pressed against the child's naked body like a stinging and burning ice-crust. The child started crying. Then its throat began to rattle. Kuch cut a piece of liver out of a frozen reindeer's carcass and stuck it in the child's mouth.

Little Teu grew quiet at once.

The sleds drove on across the *tundra* for a long time—so long that the reindeer began to snort and cough wearily.

Imteurgin pulled up his sled and the whole train halted. They all got down from the sleds on to the uneven snow, furrowed by the wind, and craned their necks.

The white sky ceased at the horizon of the *tundra* and another sky, studded with bright holes, as if perforated with arrows, took its place.

'You can see the light of the third sky through those holes,' said Imteurgin.

'It must be warm in the third sky,' said Tyllim, rubbing his frozen right cheek on his shoulder.

'Yes,' Imteurgin said. 'Wherever it is bright it is warm too. I expect it's summer there now.'

The men unharnessed the reindeer. The women stamped a hollow in the snow and set up the tent. Then they put up the partition inside the tent and spread out the beds of skins on the snow.

Kuch unstrapped the children and carried them in behind the partition. She undressed quickly and was unwrapping little Teu when she noticed that his swaddling clothes of skins were frozen hard to his body by the hair. She began cautiously to free the skins from the child's body. Little Teu lay quiet, not crying, and Kuch assumed she was not hurting him.

She gave him her breast.

'Eat, Teu.'

The child did not move.

Kuch bent over him and listened. The child was not breathing.

She shook him and placed one of her fingers in his mouth. But his lips were tightly closed. A piece of frozen liver could be seen sticking out of one corner of his mouth. Kuch tried to get it out, but the

liver was frozen hard to the lips and tongue. She thrust her own tongue into the child's mouth, thawed the ice-coated piece of liver, and extracted it. Then she shook the child again, several times. Teu made a convulsive movement, gave a sob, and began to howl.

Meanwhile Rultu and Karawja's wife had brought two lit lamps into the inner part of the tent and hung the two teapots full of snow and the tea-kettle over them.

Kuch carried little Teu to the light and gave a loud cry. The skin of his dirty, still unwashed body was torn to ribbons and dripping with blood.

'Oh, look, Teu's back is all covered with stripes,' cried Neusskat.

Kuch called the dog and held the child close to its muzzle. The dog began to lick the blood carefully off the baby's back.

Little Teu howled and kicked out with his legs, struggling. But his mother merely stroked the dog's back, talking to him. 'Lick it all up, give Teu a new, hard skin, just like yours!'

The dog licked the child completely all over and crawled back to its corner.

Kuch took a piece of reindeer bacon out of the lamp, chewed it, spat it out in her hand, and rubbed the child's wounds well with the warm fat.

Meanwhile the men, too, had crawled behind the partition. They ate their fill of



meat and lay down to sleep. The women sat round the lamps and began to mend clothes and boots. Kuch patched up the hole in her husband's boot, turned his stockings skin outwards, and hung them up to dry on a thong stretched from one end of the inner part of the tent to the other. The stockings were heavy with damp and exuded a strong odour of sweat. Kuch pushed them away from the neighbourhood of the sleeping men.

'They smell strong,' she observed to the women. 'But Teu's clothes smell even more. The son will certainly be stronger than the father. He'll make a clever hunter. That is good!'

Her son, however, was rolling himself up in the reindeer-skin and panting. He was so hot that Neusskat could not bear to lie next him any longer. She said to her mother:

'Take my brother away. He's so hot. He keeps kicking me and won't let me go to sleep.'

Kuch thrust the baby away from Neusskat and lay down between the two children.

Imteurgin woke before dawn and aroused the rest. Karawja got up without assistance, but Kutuwja and Tyllim had to be lifted up by main force and placed in front of the fire to put some life in them.

'They're both just like bears,' said Karawja. 'What they'd most like to do would be to sleep through the whole winter.'

But Kutuwja and Tyllim were already stretching themselves and rubbing their eyes.

The men crawled out from behind the partition into the cold outer part of the tent. They took their furs, stiff with frost, from the thongs to which they were hanging and put them on their naked bodies. They felt much colder when they had got their clothes on.

All four ran out of the tent and went off at full speed to look for the reindeer.

It was still dark. Only a trained eye could recognize a large grey mass in the distance.

It was the reindeer, huddled into a group on account of the cold. The steam of their breath thickened to a mist above their heads.

The men caught the reindeer and harnessed them again to the sleds. The women and children, swathed in shaggy skins, were already waiting at the spot where they had rested for the night. The tent lay, folded, on the snow.

The two families took up the same positions as they had occupied the day before. Im-teurgin was at the head of the whole train and Rultu right at the end with the piebald yoke of reindeer. Little Teu was the only one who had to change places. His mother took him with her and left Neusskat to ride alone.

As time went on Neusskat grew bored. She turned round and made a smacking noise with her lips. The dog, all white with frost, jumped out of a snow-drift and made a single bound, at top speed, on to the sled.





CHUKCHEE MAN WEARING A SUIT OF WALRUS-SKIN

## CHAPTER IX

### A HERD OF TENTS

**I**N the distance a camp became visible. Over it lay a thick cloud of mist. Imteurgin turned round and said:

‘There are many people there. It is a big herd of tents.’

He lashed on the reindeer with a long leather whip

The pointed tops of the tents appeared through the mist. Men’s voices, the barking of dogs, and the clashing of the antlers of reindeer became recognizable.

Imteurgin pulled up his team outside the first tent.

A large crowd of people, men, women, and children, were already awaiting the guests there. They were all dressed in differently coloured holiday furs. One had a collar of black wolverine’s fur on, another a wolfskin cap, others had fur jerkins with borders of red fox and white mittens made of fox’s paws.

The people jostled to and fro among the tents, shouting and laughing.

‘Did you have a good journey? Come and pay me a visit,’ cried an oldish man, setting his foot on the runner of Imteurgin’s sled.

'Ah, Pelpell!' Imteurgin greeted him genially. 'How are you getting on, Pelpell? How are you off for reindeer? How many animals have you caught?'

'Drive to my tent and I'll tell you all about it,' answered Pelpell. He sat down next to Imteurgin on the sled.

They drove to the other end of the camp and halted before a tent made of old worn-out skins. They tied the reindeer to a *purier*<sup>1</sup> and crawled into the inner part of the tent.

Shortly afterwards the rest of the sleds arrived in front of the tent, and the inner part of it became packed with people.

Inside the tent it was getting hot and smoky. They sat round the fire and began to break up reindeer bones. There was much fresh and fat marrow in the bones. When every one had eaten his fill Pelpell cleared his throat and began to tell his story.

'All through the autumn I wandered along the edge of the forest and set *utkutschins*. I caught ten foxes, big ones, with thick pelts. That was good. Then a Russian merchant visited us. He brought with him a new teapot made of red copper. He took all my foxes in exchange for that teapot. That night, when everything was quiet, he drove

<sup>1</sup> A leathern thong fastened round the tent at the height of a man's shoulder and used for tethering reindeer

off to Ermatschyn, and the teapot went with him.'

'A merchant, you say?' Imteurgin asked. 'Did he have hair on his face?'

'Yes, his whole face was covered with red hair. Just like an old wolf's muzzle.'

'Just listen to me, then,' cried Imteurgin excitedly. 'A merchant like that visited me too. And he showed me, too, a copper pot and a kettle——'

'And took them away with him again?' Pelpell interrupted.

'Yes, he took the whole lot away with him; the teapot, the kettle, and the foxskins.'

'What a wicked man he is!' exclaimed Pelpell. 'I should like to fight him! But he never goes out of the tent. He sits inside it the whole time.'

'Is he here, then?'

'Yes. He sits in Ermatschyn's tent feeding his dogs on reindeer meat.'

'And the teapot? Has he still got it?' Imteurgin asked.

'No. He has given the teapot to Ermatschyn.'

'I'm going to see him,' said Imteurgin, beginning to dress.

'So am I,' said Pelpell.

'So are we,' said Tyllim and Kutuwja.

The men set out for Ermatschyn's tent.

A big black tent stood in the centre of the camp. It was made of fine glossy reindeer skins sewn together.



Imteurgin looked it over from top to bottom and said:

'What a big tent. If I slaughtered every reindeer I have I couldn't make such a big one.'

Next to the black tent stood another, set up on three sleds fastened together. It was covered with a green cloth, and a bearskin hung over the entrance. This was Ermat-schyn's travelling tent.

Pellpell lifted the bearskin and thrust his head into the tent

'Merchant,' he called into the interior, 'give us the teapot! Give us the kettle!'

Some one in the tent gave a slight cough, sighed, and stretched himself. Then a red beard stuck out from behind the bearskin.

'There he is!' cried Imteurgin.

'Give us the teapot!' shouted Pellpell.

The merchant roared out something in his own language and pushed Pellpell in the chest with all his strength. Pellpell staggered back. The bearskin swung into place again across the entrance to the tent.

Pellpell drew his dagger.

'Don't stab him! Don't!' shouted Imteurgin, seizing him by the arm.

'Let me go!' roared Pellpell. 'I want to fight him!'

Imteurgin caught Pellpell round the body with both hands and fell down with him on to the snow.

At the same moment Kutuwja, Tyllim, and some other young men belonging to the camp made a rush at the tent, tore away the bearskin, and pulled the merchant out by the feet. He was stark naked. His chest, hands, and legs were covered with red hair.

'Into the snow with him!' cried Kutuwja, seizing the merchant with the assistance of the others and hurling him, with the full weight of their united bodies, into the snow-drifts.

The merchant was buried as though the earth had swallowed him up. Only a single tuft of red hair showed above the heap of snow.

Every one burst into a roar of laughter. Kutuwja jumped on to the loose mass of snow, beneath which the merchant was rolling about, stamped about on it, and shouted:

'There's one for the teapot! There's another for the kettle! There's another for the foxskins!'

The other young men, too, threw themselves on to the heap of snow and belaboured it with hands and feet. The snow-drift heaved and groaned.

'Get hold of the fox's tail!' cried Kutuwja, reaching for the merchant's red tuft of hair.

The crowd roared with laughter.

'That'll do,' said Imteurgin. 'He'll remember that as long as he lives. Let's go back to the tent now.'

Every one returned in a good humour, as after a successful hunt, to Pelpell's tent. They told each other, with vivacious gestures, how they had stuck the merchant in the snow and pulled his hair and knocked him about.

'He's a heavy man and he kicked out with his feet like a reindeer. And what a strong growth of hair he has on his face! I tore and tore away at it and it wouldn't come out!'

'I gave him one in the guts, though!'

'And I gave him one in his liver!'

On the way more and more people joined them. By the time they reached Pelpell's tent the inner part of it was not big enough to hold them. The partition was removed and every one sat round on skins, occupying the whole tent.

Imteurgin filled his pipe with black tobacco and larch-shavings, then he turned to Pelpell.

'Well, what else did you do?'

Pelpell sat down in his original seat and went on with his tale.

'Well, I wandered along the edge of the forest all the autumn and set *utkutschins*. I caught a lot of foxes. Then the Wind began to blow and snowed us under. The walls of our tent were blocked with snow. Well, we sat here in this tent and listened. The Wind dashed about, shouting in different voices. Then something black crawled up on top

of the tent and began scratching at the skins. It was just over my head. "I'm sure it's a *kael*," I thought; "he's hungry and wants to gobble us up." My wife even stopped breathing she was so frightened of the *kael*. We sat there and listened. Suddenly something heavy fell from up there on to the ground, then I too stopped breathing.

'My wife nestled up to me and whispered:

' "Listen, he's gnawing the meat that's lying in the tent."

'I strained my ears. And it was true. The *kael* was wandering about the tent and gnashing his teeth. Sometimes he came right up to the partition and sometimes he went into the other corner of the tent, just gnashing his teeth like that.

'I said to my wife:

' "Let him eat up all the meat. If he eats his fill he won't do us any harm."

'All that night we could not sleep. All that night we heard the *kael* nibbling the frozen meat in our tent.

'Then I felt thirsty. The baby felt thirsty too and began to cry. It was necessary to go into the outer part of the tent and get some snow. But I couldn't go beyond the partition. So I sat with my dagger in my hand and waited for the *kael* to put his head round it.

'Time passed. I kept getting thirstier and thirstier. I put my ear against the partition

and listened. The *kael* might have been quite near. But he wasn't. He was still nibbling in the corner where the meat was.

'I couldn't restrain myself any longer and just lifted up the partition a tiny bit. I looked round into the outer part of the tent with one eye. Everything was dark. There was nothing to be seen. I took the lamp and stretched it out cautiously. The outer part of the tent grew light.

'I watched. There was a shadow, a h-u-u-ge shadow creeping along the wall of the tent. It almost covered the whole of the wall. It was hunchbacked, its snout had sharp teeth, its ears were hairy and stiff, and its tail, which was broad, bushy, and long, actually covered part of the opposite wall. "What ever sort of an animal can that be?" I thought to myself. "It's as big as a bear, it has ears and tail like a fox, and a snout like a wolf." I still couldn't see the animal itself, but only its shadow.

'Suddenly it yelped like a little dog.

'It was a fox!

'I laughed, and said to my wife:

' "It's a fox——"

'My wife pulled at my arm and whispered:

' "Don't laugh. Perhaps the *kael* has turned himself into a fox. *Kaels* are cunning."

'I crawled back behind the partition. And then I was frightened again. But, all

the same, after a time I had another look round the partition and perceived a little animal. I let out a yell at it and shook my fist in a threatening manner. The animal shrank back and grew smaller still. Then I rushed into the outer part of the tent, and began stamping about and shouting. The animal cowered in a corner, frightened. I rushed at it and seized it round the neck with both hands. It was a fine fox. If you pulled its tail over its back you could cover its ears. That's the sort of fox it was! I gave it to the merchant in exchange for the tea-pot.'

'You told that story well,' said Imteurgin approvingly. 'Now you just listen to what *I'm* going to tell you.'

And he described in detail how his best reindeer had gone astray in the snow-storm.

'We do not know who it was drove our reindeer away. He had snowshoe-thongs without knots and he left deep tracks in the snow. He must have been a strong man. A man like that can keep on his legs all through the winter and is not afraid of the strongest Wind. Just like myself when I was young. In those days I was never afraid of the Wind and didn't sit by the fire in winter either. But I can't go on like that nowadays.'

'That's not true what you've just been saying,' Pelpell replied. 'You're still our

strongest herdsman, even now. Ermatschyn himself can't touch you. He's not so big as you are, and he's weaker too. His father, old Ermatschyn, was a different sort. He used to carry whole reindeer on his back, and alive, too. The Russian Cossacks<sup>1</sup> used to think a reindeer was charging them, and they didn't shoot. Old Ermatschyn used to come up quite close to them, then he would throw the reindeer off his shoulders and go for the Cossacks with his lance. He'd down the lot of them, then jump on his reindeer and off he'd go. That's the sort of warrior he was'

'Well, who was it, then, that drove off your reindeer?' a young fellow called Tyrki asked Imteurgin.

'You ought to know better than we,' Kutuwja answered him. 'You live in Ermatschyn's tent. I'm pretty sure your herd was a good deal bigger after the snow-storm.'

Every one looked at Tyrki.

Pell observed:

'Ermatschyn is in need of a lot of reindeer-skins just now. He's bought a lot of things from that Russian merchant—knives, sugar, and pots too, and cloth for his tent. He'll have to give the merchant a lot of skins for all that.'

'He's got quite enough reindeer of his

<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, as often happened in the eighteenth, fierce fighting took place in north-east Siberia between Government troops and the natives.

own,' said Karawja. 'What does he take other people's for?'

'Right enough, he's got a big herd as it is,' Pelpell rejoined. 'But the reindeer in his herd are ours. Ermatschyn is the Russian merchant's friend. He'd like to give him all our reindeer for those Russian goods of his, but we won't let them go. That's why he goes creeping after other people's reindeer at nights.'

'He'd better stop that,' Imteurgin interposed, 'otherwise he'll find himself lassoed one of these fine days.'

'And a good job that would be, too,' commented Pelpell's wife. 'Ermatschyn might grow a little tamer then. Have you seen his new tent? The Big Russians are the only people who wear green clothes, and he's gone and covered every bit of his whole tent with green cloth.'

'That is bad talk,' said Tyrki. 'Ermatschyn shares all his Russian goods with you and only keeps just a few for himself.'

'Bad talk yourself,' retorted Pelpell's wife. 'A lot he gives us. He gave old Mitchirgin a Russian axe and took all his reindeer in exchange. Old Mitchirgin has moved off a long way from us since then and he hasn't even come to the Festival. Perhaps he's died of hunger already, somewhere out there.'



CHAPTER X  
BIG RUSSIANS

EARLY in the morning a strong, tall man, wearing a black wolfskin cap, entered Pelpell's tent. He lifted up a corner of the curtain over the entrance and said:

'Up with you, Pelpell! There are dog-men coming.'

Pelpell stood up, rubbing his eyes.

'Dog-men?'

'Yes. There are Big Russians coming,' said the man with the black wolfskin cap. 'We shall have to give them a good reception.'

Imteurgin was asleep in his own tent, which he had set up next to Pelpell's.

Pelpell awoke him.

'Ermatschyn has just paid me a visit. He told me there are dog-men coming.'

'Where do they come from?'

'They are Russian chiefs, Ermatschyn says, Big Russians. We shall have to give them a reception.'

Kutuwja and Tyllim were lying next to Imteurgin. They woke up and turned to look at Pelpell. •

'Perhaps it's Ermatschyn's friend who is coming?' Kutuwja suggested.

'No, his friends are merchants,' answered Pelpell. 'And these people seem to be altogether different—strangers.'

'Perhaps it is Tech-Arem.<sup>1</sup> He always comes about this time.'

'Yes, perhaps it is Tech-Arem.'

Tyllim stood up and began to dress.

'Where are you going?' Kutuwja asked him.

'I'm going to my tent to tell my brother that Tech-Arem is coming.'

Tyllim left the tent. Pelpell, Imteurgin, and Kutuwja followed him.

A great crowd of people were moving to and fro among the tents. They were all staring into the distance, holding their hands to their foreheads.

The women were telling one another that two men were coming on dog-sleighs from a long way off and were bringing a lot of goods with them—sweet stones, Russian clothing, and grass for the pipes. It was all going to be free, they said.

'Who told you that?' Imteurgin asked the women.

'Ermatschyn. A Cossack has already arrived and is sitting with Ermatschyn in his tent.'

They all went to Ermatschyn's black tent. Near one of the tents stood a long black sleigh. Strange, shaggy dogs were quarrelling over frozen meat.

<sup>1</sup> Collector of the *jassak* or poll-tax.

Pelpell, Imteurgin, and Kutuwja entered the tent.

In the middle of the roomy tent some lamps were burning, filled to the brim with reindeer fat. Two large kettles full of meat hung over them.

In the corner nearest the entrance, near the lofty wall of the partition, two men were sitting. They were drinking tea. One of them, who was naked and broad-shouldered, was rapidly tipping up one saucer after another into his mouth. His body was red and covered with sweat. Dirty streams of sweat were running over his neck, shoulders, and chest. It was Ermatschyn, the owner of the tent. The second man was slender, had a moustache, and wore a grey suit with bright buttons. He sipped the tea with deliberation from the edge of his saucer and wiped his moustache after every mouthful.

Imteurgin and Kutuwja sat down next to Ermatschyn and drew their jerkins off over their heads.

Ermatschyn's wife, a plump, red-cheeked woman with thick black plaits, adjusted the teapot on the hook.

Imteurgin nudged Pelpell with his elbow.

'Look, there's my new teapot hanging up there.'

'Mine too,' said Pelpell. 'I gave a lot of foxskins for that teapot.'

Ermatschyn gave the guests a glance out

of the corner of his eye and called to his wife:

'Give the guests some tea.'

The guests drank their tea in silence. They drank one cup, then a second, then a third. Ermatschyn's wife had to tip the spout of the teapot farther and farther over. Then she took the pot off the hook and left the tent to refill it with snow. Ermatschyn wiped his sweat-covered face with a fox's tail, cleared his throat, and said:

'Tech-Arem is paying us a visit and a Russian *shaman* is coming with him.'

'What do they bring with them?' asked Imteurgin.

'Good things. Many good things,' Ermatschyn replied. 'They bring us presents.'

'The Russians don't give presents away free,' observed Imteurgin.

Just then Tyrki's head appeared from beyond the entrance-curtain.

'The dogs are coming!' he called out in a loud voice.

All the men put on their reindeer-skin jerkins and left the tent.

Far out in the *tundra* the dog-teams, like long black worms, could be seen winding over the white snow towards the camp.

The camp dogs scented the strangers and began to bark ferociously. A distant whining broke out in answer. The swishing of the sleigh-runners, too, soon became audible,

and the occupants of the sleighs could be seen clearly.

'Here come the guests!' shouted Tyrki.

On the first sleighs, which were fastened together, sat two people dressed in long leathern jerkins with hoods, which were worn over their furs. The team was driven by a short-legged Cossack, wearing a pointed cap made of crisp-haired skins and a long, furred jerkin reaching to his knees. He ran beside the sleigh, driving on the dogs with a stick and shouting hoarsely

'He runs well,' Ermatschyn observed. 'He's a strong fellow, that's certain. Just look how far the other sleighs are behind him.' The three sleighs to the rear, which were also fastened together, were driven by a second Cossack. He sat sideways on the foremost sleigh, banging its forepart with his stick. The sleighs were loaded high with big sacks crammed full of goods.

People began streaming out of all the tents.

'*Toi-toi*,' shouted the short-legged Cossack with the first team, driving his stick into the snow between the runners. The sleighs halted.

The dogs collapsed, burying their muzzles, their tongues hanging out, in the snow.

Ermatschyn pushed through the crowd, thrusting the rest aside. He hurried to the foremost sleigh and helped the man in the

coloured jerkin to alight. The man got down ceremoniously, shook himself, and stamped hard with his great boots of undressed leather. Then, supporting himself on Ermatschyn's shoulder, he walked slowly towards the latter's tent.

The second man, who was wearing a black jerkin, climbed down from the sleigh alone and followed the first.

The younger boys belonging to the camp at first wanted to force their way after him, but Ermatschyn roared out something at them and they went slowly away.

'I had a good look at the Russians all the same,' said Kutuwja. 'They're funny-looking people. I never saw such men before. One had red patches on his shoulders and the other had quite wide sleeves, wider than my trousers.'

" 'I saw something too,' said Tyllim. 'One had short hair, the other quite long, longer than Kuch's.'

The young men loitered about among the tents for a long time and did not separate until it grew dark.

Silence fell on the camp. But the Cossacks were busy about Ermatschyn's tent until late that night. They were unloading the big sacks full of Russian goods and taking them from the sleighs into the tent.

'Reindeer-men!'

The man with the red patches on his

shoulders turned, next morning, to address the crowd.

'The Russian Tsar, the great lord beyond the sun, sends you presents. Here they are!'

The man pointed to a mountain of leather sacks.

'The sacks were thicker yesterday,' said Imteurgin. 'They've got quite thin during the night. There's only the leather left.'

The man with the red shoulder-patches became speechless and glared ferociously at Imteurgin.

'That's bad talk,' said he. 'Do you think we've taken anything for ourselves?'

'It may be that you have,' called Kutuwja from behind his father's back. 'The sacks were thicker yesterday.'

'Who's that jabbering over there? Just come here, will you?' roared the man, running his eyes over the crowd in search of Kutuwja.

But just then the other guest, the man with the wide sleeves, stepped forward and lifted up a copper-plated stick with a cross-piece. He flourished the stick up and down and from side to side and muttered something in a deep voice. The women drew back timidly, hiding behind their men.

'He wants to fight,' said Kutuwja. 'Do you think I'd better get my lance?'

But the man with the wide sleeves was already lowering his copper-plated stick.

The short-legged Cossack carried a wooden chest out of the tent and placed it on the sleigh.

The man with the wide sleeves took a gold-embroidered robe out of the chest and slipped it over his head. Then he took from the chest some coloured slabs and a copper vessel hung on three long chains. He handed the vessel to the short-legged man and leaned the slabs against the sacks on the sleigh.

'Oh, look, just look! There are people looking at us out of his slabs!' screamed the women. 'Their eyes are round and their faces go right down to their stomachs!'<sup>1</sup>

The man in the gold robe touched each of the slabs with his lips and took the copper vessel with the chains from the short-legged man.

Blue smoke rose from the copper vessel.

'That smells bad,' said Karawja, turning away. 'Like when we singe sealskins.'

'It's a very bad stink,' remarked Pelpell. 'Like rotten meat.'

Imteurgin wrinkled his nose.

'It stenches like a polecat caught in a trap.'

The man in the gold robe held the vessel by the end of the chains, swung it to and fro in front of him, and began to sing in a loud voice.

'He has a soft, deep voice,' remarked the

<sup>1</sup> This refers to the long beards represented on the skins.



women. 'It hardly penetrates the ear. But the robe is a fine one. Where did he get it? Perhaps his reindeer have golden skins.'

The man continued to swing the vessel to and fro. Sometimes he turned his back to the crowd, sometimes he faced them. He paced slowly up and down, bowed to the slabs, and sang on unceasingly.

When he stopped singing the other guests sang, the short-legged Cossack, the man with the red patches on his shoulders, and the merchant.

The merchant was standing to one side, stooping. He held his hand against his bandaged face. He was standing on one leg, groaning, and singing, without moving his head, in a thin, womanish voice. The other two sang in loud and hoarse tones.

The man in the gold robe lifted up the copper-plated stick with the cross-piece and the guests took it in turns to rub their beards on it. Then he slipped off the gold robe, put it away in the chest, together with the slabs and the vessel, and went into the tent. The merchant hobbled after him.

The camp people stood where they were, as though frozen, and stared after him.

'Look, he's limping!' Kutuwja pointed at the merchant.

'And his face is bandaged. It's sure to be swollen and mottled,' said Tyllim.

'Reindeer-men!' shouted the man with the

red shoulder-patches suddenly; 'we have brought you costly gifts. Any one may take as many as he pleases. He need only bring skins with him. Wolves, foxes, otters, black bears, and white bears. All the skins he has. And he may take presents in exchange. Who comes first?'

'I come first, I, Tawrinwat!' said an old, undersized man wearing skin trousers and a Russian blouse of red cloth.

He fetched a large polar bear's skin, shining like snow, out of a neighbouring tent and threw it skilfully near the sleigh. The skin fell outspread, its four paws pointing in different directions.

The man with the red shoulder-patches squatted down, ran his hand over the long and thick fur of the skin, and said:

'Choose a present.'

Tawrinwat bent over the sleigh and took a bottle with bluish water in it from the heap of goods.

'*O-cho-cho!*' shouted the crowd. 'Tawrinwat always has luck.'

Tawrinwat placed the bottle inside his blouse and rummaged on in the heap. He pulled out a large copper kettle and waddled off with it.

'What a greedy wolf he is! He's only given one skin and taken two presents in exchange for it.'

Tawrinwat's son, Ljaty, hurried up and

threw two thickly furred foxskins on the snow.

In exchange for them he helped himself to a tablet of pressed tea and a big sugar-loaf.

Then Tawrinwat's wife stepped forward and threw a dark beaver-skin, the hairs on it gold-coloured at the ends, on the sleigh. She chose a large, rusty pan.

The women surrounded her and examined the Russian iron vessel all over.

Pell took a long look at the gifts piled up on the sleigh, then plucked Imteurgin by the sleeve and pointed with his finger at a thick sheaf of black tobacco leaves. It was lying on the outermost edge of the sleigh.

'We shall have to have that.'

Pell put his hand under his collar, fetched out a red foxskin, and went over to the sleigh.

But Tawrinwat stood in his path. He was holding a bundle of skins under his arm.

'I take all the gifts!' cried Tawrinwat in a loud voice. He flung a heap of fox, otter, lynx, and wolverine-skins on to the snow. The white, black, yellow, and dappled skins formed a pile like a variously coloured and bushy mountain. Tawrinwat took all the tobacco, tea, sugar, cups, and saucepans off the sleigh. He loaded his son, his daughter, and his wife with them and hung brightly coloured cloths, necklaces of glass beads, and silk ribbons on his own person. The family

moved off slowly, accompanied as they went by the clatter of the cups, the tinkling of the beads, and the hollow, ringing sounds of the saucepans.

Pelpell had to content himself with a single lump of sugar, Tyllim with a single packet of biscuits, Karawja's wife with one thimble and one cotton head-cloth.

When the crowd dispersed only the man with the red shoulder-patches and Ermatschyn remained standing by the sleigh.

They squatted down in front of the pile of skins and arranged them in order of species, putting all the foxes, beavers, and lynxes together.

A crowd collected in the *tundra* behind the camp. Suddenly an agile young lad dashed out of its front rank and instantly began to hop about

'*Choch, Tyrki, Choch!*' shouted the crowd.

Tyrki bent low and darted, as though butting through the air with his head, towards the camp.

'*Choch, Kutuwja, Choch!*'

Kutuwja bent down in the same way and dashed after Tyrki with long strides.

Tyrki tried to escape, but Kutuwja soon had him firmly by the belt.

'Kutuwja runs well,' was the approving verdict of the older people. 'He goes even quicker than a *chorongo*.'

Tawrinwat stepped forward out of the

crowd. He was brandishing a long lance, tipped with reindeer bone, and called out:

'Who'll take me on?'

'I will!' said Imteurgin. He thrust through the crowd and stood before Tawrinwat.

The stout, undersized Tawrinwat and the gigantic Imteurgin confronted one another, close together.

Tawrinwat gave ground half a pace and said:

'A long lasso and a man's head.'

Imteurgin spread out his lasso on the snow, took off his cap of wolverine-skin, and laid it at the end of the lasso.

Tawrinwat raised his arm, took aim for a while with his lance, and then threw it. The lance whistled through the air and plunged into the snow without touching the cap.

'Missed,' said Imteurgin. 'You put down your cap now.'

Tawrinwat took off his fluffy cap, made of two beaver skins sewn together, and flung it on the ground.

Imteurgin pulled the lance out of the snow-drift, went back to his place, and threw it.

The lance pierced right through the centre of the crown of the cap and remained quivering, stuck in the snow.

'*Cho!*' growled the crowd, delighted. 'Imteurgin has made a hole in Tawrinwat's head.'

Tawrinwat won't live long now, that's certain.'

Tawrinwat placed one foot on the other, stripped off his fur blouse, covered with red cloth, threw it down on the snow, and called out:

'Two long lassoes and hit the reindeer in the heart.'

The young men measured out the distance with the lassoes and fastened a black reindeer skin to two lances. Then they ran quickly to one side.

Tawrinwat threw the lance. The crowd laughed loudly. The lance had flown over the target and stuck in the snow.

Imteurgin glanced at Tawrinwat. He was standing by with a sullen expression on his face and his hands were trembling.

'Now it's my turn,' said Imteurgin. He pulled the lance out of the snow

He drew back his right shoulder, put his left leg forward, and lifted his arm.

The lance, quivering a little, flew through the air towards the reindeer skin. It pierced the very spot at which a living reindeer's heart would be.

An approving murmur ran through the crowd. Tyllim dashed forward, turned a somersault in front of Tawrinwat, and stuck his tongue out at him, hopping on one foot.

'We haven't finished yet,' snarled Tawrinwat.

He seized the lance swiftly and threw it with all his might at Imteurgin. The latter caught the lance in mid-air and turned its point against Tawrinwat.

Tawrinwat wheeled round and fled to his tent.

Imteurgin looked at Tawrinwat's bare heels and his trousers hanging down about them and laughed. Then he gave a wave of his hand.

'Let him run, poor wretched hare!'

He broke Tawrinwat's lance across his knee and flung the pieces down on the red blouse which Tawrinwat had left lying on the ground in his haste.

Ermatschyn's herdsmen selected ten large reindeer from their master's herd and drove them towards the tents. The camp people began to hunt them with lassos.

The animals snorted, running from one tent to another, leaping from side to side, and throwing up the snow in showers with their hoofs.

Suddenly a big black reindeer buried his nose in the snow, directing the sharp ends of his antlers at the people standing round. The crowd divided.

'That's the one with the big antlers!' cried Imteurgin, and made a dash at the reindeer.

The animal made an abrupt movement with its antlers, which began stabbing the air in all directions.

Imteurgin, however, showed no sign of fear. He approached the reindeer from one side and tickled it behind the ear.

The reindeer snorted and bent its head slowly backwards.

'Catch it while it's tame!' shouted the crowd from all sides.

The reindeer gave them an oblique glance out of its bloodshot eyes and lowered its antlers again.

'Don't be afraid,' said Imteurgin, stroking the reindeer's neck. 'I won't let the strange people slaughter you.'

'Catch it!' cried the crowd again. At the same moment a long rope whistled through the air. The leather lasso wound itself round the branching antlers. The reindeer reared on its hind legs, ramping, then fell to the ground on its back.

'It's my reindeer! I'm not going to let my reindeer be slaughtered.'

Imteurgin drew his dagger and hewed at the lasso. The rope parted. Imteurgin sprang, dagger in hand, at the young herdsman who still held an end of the lasso in his hand.

The herdsman threw up his hands and took to his heels.

He ran off with long strides, continually looking over his shoulder.

Kutuwja, Karawja, and Tyllim chased him from different directions.



The herdsman reached the black tents and disappeared behind the bearskin entrance-curtain.

Inside the tent Ermatschyn, his wife, and the Russian guests were sitting in the light of the burning lamps. They were drinking tea. The herdsman had scarcely taken refuge behind Ermatschyn's back when Imteurgin, Karawja, Kutuwja, Tyllim, and a few other lads dashed in after the fugitive.

They leapt over the burning lamps, seized the herdsman, and tumbled with him to the ground in the midst of the tea-cups and the plates filled with reindeer meat.

'*Mee!*' roared out Ermatschyn. He threw his tea-saucer on to the skin he was sitting on and jumped up. The fragments of the brightly painted saucer and the splashes of tea flew in all directions.

'*Mee!*' roared Ermatschyn again, snatching his dagger from the wall.

The Russian guests, the priest, and the police officer with the red tabs on his shoulders threw away their cups and crawled on all fours into the corners of the tent. The red-haired merchant gave a wild cry, upset a lamp, and hid himself as far away as he could.

The tent was plunged into semi-darkness.

'Shoot, Cossacks!' shouted the policeman, putting his head out from behind the entrance-curtain.

But the three Cossacks sat where they were, leaning back against the wall of the other tent, and merely watched the men scuffling on the skins, without taking any part in the struggle.

'You greedy wolf, why did you drive off my reindeer?' shouted Imteurgin to Ermatschyn, flourishing his dagger.

'I didn't know they were yours,' retorted Ermatschyn, thrusting Imteurgin's arm aside. 'They were alone in the *tundra* without herdsmen.'

'Every one knows which are my reindeer, you greedy wolf. Give me back my reindeer!'

Ermatschyn cleared his throat, took Imteurgin by the sleeve, and said:

'Have them if you like, Imteurgin. Choose as many reindeer out of my herd as you have lost. That suit you?'

'Suits me,' said Imteurgin. 'Here, Kutuwja, Tyllim!'

He was already making for the entrance to the tent, but Ermatschyn held him back.

'There is a great feast in my tent,' said he. 'I have great guests with me. Do you too make one of my great guests.'

Imteurgin reflected for a time and then said to Kutuwja and Tyllim:

'Go to our tent. I'll come later.'

The plump red-cheeked woman with the thick black plaits came out of the inner part

of the tent. She swept up the fragments of the tea-things, laid a sealskin across a wide bed, and placed fresh cups, saucers, and plates upon it.

The Russian guests crawled back out of their corners and took their places again round the teapot. Ermatschyn made Imteurgin sit beside him and served him with some fat pieces of meat.

The red-haired merchant threw a glance at Imteurgin, smiled furtively, and said something to the policeman and the priest in his own language.

Then he took a bottle out of a small box and poured some bluish water into the cups.

The priest drank first. He put his head back, rolling his eyes. Then he slipped a small piece of reindeer meat into his mouth, chewed it, and drew a long breath.

Then it was the merchant's turn. He thrust out his torn beard, lifted the cup to his lips with deliberation, and swallowed the liquor in small sips.

The police officer gave Ermatschyn the next turn and handed the cup to him.

Ermatschyn opened his mouth wide, poured the contents of the cup into it with a single movement, and shut his eyes tight.

Then it was Imteurgin's turn. He took a sniff at the cup, glanced out of the corner of his eye at the red-haired merchant, and then put the vodka aside.

'Drink,' Ermatschyn encouraged him. 'That is good water, strong water. The Tsar himself drinks it.'

Imteurgin did not move.

'Drink,' insisted Ermatschyn. 'You are my guest. I am giving you back the reindeer.'

Imteurgin drained the cup and sat still with his mouth open. The last to drink was the police officer. He tasted the vodka before he took the first swallow of it. Then he smacked his lips, cleared his throat in a satisfied manner, clicked his tongue, and demanded hoarsely:

'What about a meal now, gentlemen?'

The drunken guests reached greedily for the meat, stuffed it into their mouths with both hands, laughed, and smacked their wet lips.

The herdsman put his head round the bearskin and called:

'Ermatschyn, come out and slaughter the reindeer!'

Ermatschyn rose. He took Imteurgin's arm and both left the tent, their arms about one another's shoulders. The reindeer were standing close by on the trampled snow.

The animals were drawn up in two rows, facing one another. Each reindeer's antlers were fastened with a lasso to those of the animal standing opposite. Near the reindeer a thin little man, wearing black bearskin furs, was tramping about in the snow.

Kutuwa hurried up to Imteurgin.

'Father, they really are our reindeer. There's the one with the big antlers and the one with the coloured foot and the crooked-footed one. They're all ours!'

Imteurgin, however, was not listening. He caught hold of the thin little man in the bearskin by the shoulder and roared:

'*Mee, shaman*, slaughter the reindeer!'

The *shaman* disentangled one arm from his furs and walked up to the reindeer with the big antlers.

He touched the reindeer behind the ear, then ran his hand over its backbone and thrust a long bone knife into the animal's flank.

In this way he slaughtered all the reindeer one after another.

Then women came out of the tents with knives and pots. They set up great piles of faggots and old, dried-up antlers.

When the fires had been lit the women cut up the reindeer liver and threw the raw, smoking meat into the pots.

'*Mee, people!*' shouted Ermatschyn. 'Come and eat liver!'

Men, women, and children collected round the fires and began to tear at the pieces of liver, heart, kidney, and tendon, with their teeth.

Imteurgin and Ermatschyn each seized one end of a fat kidney, cut it through the

middle, and stuffed the pieces into their mouths.

'Good!' said Ermatschyn.

'Fat!' said Imteurgin.

Pelpell and Karawja ate the black, fresh liver, which occasionally went the wrong way down their throats, and Kutuwja and Tyllim chewed tendons torn from a reindeer's hind leg.

The police officer, the priest, the merchant, and the Cossacks approached too. They sat down in front of the fires and began to gnaw the reindeer bones and suck out the fat marrow.

The short-legged Cossack drew a whole reindeer's head with its sharp, branching antlers towards him, examined it all over, and then scooped out its left eyeball with his knife. He inserted the eyeball with great care into his mouth.

It was a big eyeball. The Cossack's cheeks swelled. He bit on the eyeball, but it slipped from under his teeth. It was a difficult business to get his teeth into it. The Cossack at last held it tight between his tongue and one finger and bit hard.

The eyeball was squashed flat, burst, and discharged a salty liquid into his mouth. The Cossack swallowed loudly, licked his lips and moustache, and got up reeling. He was quite drunk.

'I want to fight!' he roared hoarsely. 'Come on, any of you who dare!'

Without waiting for an answer he stripped off his leather jerkin and cloth coat. His body was white and hairy, his head round, and his neck squat and wrinkled.

'Well, who dares?' asked the Cossack, smiting his chest and shoulders.

'*Mee!*' shouted Ermatschyn. 'Hurry up! Don't keep our Russian guest waiting so long in the cold.'

The crowd stood motionless, staring in silence at the stout guest with the bull neck.

'You take him on, Kutuwja!' cried old Tawrinwat.

Kutuwja did not reply.

'Afraid, are you?' jeered Tawrinwat.

Kutuwja looked at his father.

Imteurgin was sitting before one of the fires, his head sunk on his breast.

He could scarcely lift his hand, and *stammered out with difficulty:*

'Go ahead, Kutuwja. Throw him in the snow like you did the red-haired one!'

Kutuwja stepped forward, glanced round him, and began slowly stripping off his fur jerkin.

## CHAPTER XI

### KUTUWJA CLIMBS UP TO THE SUN

**K**UTUWJA had scarcely set his legs firmly in the snow before the stout Cossack sprang at him and seized him round the neck. Kutuwja jerked himself backwards with a single movement, seized the stout man by the belt from behind, and lifted him up.

‘Good, Kutuwja!’ shouted the crowd. ‘Floor him!’

Kutuwja swung the Cossack first to one side then to the other, but suddenly stumbled and collapsed.

The Cossack’s heavy boot was pressing sideways against his leg.

Kutuwja fell on his face. The Cossack rolled over with him in the snow, seized him by the hair and the lower jaw, and gave his head a sharp twist. There was a crack. Kutuwja’s face turned over his shoulder. His chin fell on the nape of his neck.

‘The Cossack didn’t fight fair; he tripped Kutuwja!’ indignant cries resounded. ‘Start again!’

The Cossack got up slowly and went off, without looking round him, to Ermatschyn’s tent.



'Get up, Kutuwja!' cried Pelpell.

Kutuwja lay still.

Blood was flowing from his mouth and from his nose.

Pelpell squatted down beside him, felt over his head, and said:

'His neck is quite soft. The Cossack has broken his neck.'

'Death to the Cossack!' roared the crowd. 'He didn't fight fair!'

'Who is dead, the Cossack?' asked Imteurgin, who could scarcely stand on his legs.

No one answered him.

Some ran to Kutuwja, others to Ermatshyn's tent.

'Stop!' cried the little man in the bearskin. 'Stop! The sun's rising'

Every one stared at the *shaman*, then at the edge of the sky. Far out beyond the *tundra* a part of the sun was blazing up like a great fire.

The *shaman* pointed to the sun with his finger and said:

'Kutuwja is well off now. He will live in the sun's house and give us more light.'

The crowd craned their heads forward and stared at the sun with wrinkled eyelids.

'Come to me, all of you, neighbours,' called the *shaman*. 'We will all share in sending Kutuwja to the sun.'

It was then that Imteurgin first realized that Kutuwja was dead. He gave a loud

cry, rushed at Kutuwja's body, and began to shake it with all his might.

'Away with you!' said the *shaman*. 'Don't interrupt Kutuwja on his way aloft.'

Imteurgin dropped Kutuwja's corpse, glanced at the *shaman*, and stepped back a pace. Karawja and Pelpell came towards him out of the crowd. They gripped Imteurgin under the arms

'There is bad water going round in your head. Come to the tent.'

Imteurgin walked away with them, his head bent.

The *shaman* drew his bone knife, still stained with frozen reindeer's blood, muttered something to himself, and stabbed Kutuwja in the neck.

Dark blood gushed over the hand of the *shaman*. He wiped his hand clean with snow and said:

'Kutuwja, climb up to the sun! Tend her reindeer. May the sun have many piebald reindeer, for then we too shall have many. Tell our ancestors up above there to send us a good summer.'

The crowd listened to the *shaman* and stared at the dead Kutuwja. When the *shaman* ceased speaking they silently dispersed.

The sunset glow faded and white stars streamed up the sky like pearls. The Russian guests lay pell-mell in Ermatschyn's tent, snoring. The rest of the people in the

camp were already asleep, too, in their own tents.

But before the black tent the fires were still smoking and the cold kettles were hanging over them, filled with reindeer meat.

Tyllim, Karawja, and Pelpell stood in front of the fires. They were taking the cooked meat out of a kettle, cutting it into thin strips, and covering Kutuwja's corpse with them.

As soon as the corpse was completely enveloped in cooked reindeer meat they departed to sleep.

At dawn they left the tent, accompanied by Imteurgin.

A pack of great shaggy dogs was standing round the kettle. They were thrusting their muzzles into it, snarling at one another, and pulling out the remains of the cooked meat. There were dogs jostling one another, too, round Kutuwja's corpse. Baring their fangs, they tore one strip of meat after another off the corpse.

A gigantic dog with a mangled ear was gnawing Kutuwja's right leg. He had already eaten two of the toes and was preparing to finish off the rest.

A second dog with a sharp muzzle was thrusting his forepaws against Kutuwja's shoulder and burying his nose in the deep wound gashed in the neck by the knife of the *shaman*.

'The quicker they eat up Kutuwja the better,' said Imteurgin. 'That will be best, for so he will climb up sooner to the sky.'

'Yes, he will climb up to those above. That is best,' agreed Karawja and Pelpell. 'May the dogs eat him up quickly.'

They went back to their tents again.

The camp did not wake until it was full daylight. Then, gradually and one by one, people came crawling out of the tents.

At the spot where the fires had been burning the day before gnawed reindeer and human bones were lying about, together with tattered strips of grey and black hide

'Those are dogs' hides,' said Pelpell. 'Probably the dogs have been fighting'

Kutuwja was not lying on the snow now.

The inhabitants of the camp approached the scattered bones and examined them all carefully. They put the human bones on one side and threw those of the reindeer away.

As soon as there was a large heap of human bones Imteurgin and others carried them out into the *tundra*, where the *shaman* arranged them. He put down the skull first, then the backbone, then the arms, one on each side, and last of all the bones of the feet. Next to the human bones the *shaman* placed the antlers of the reindeer he had slaughtered the day before, a sled with broken runners, some torn clothing, a crooked bone knife, and a hammer.

'*Pyla urym!*'<sup>1</sup> said the *shaman*. 'Enjoy yourself up there and bring us luck.'

'*Pyla urym!*' repeated the bystanders.

They remained standing there for a time, staring at the bones, then returned to the camp.

Meanwhile the Russian guests had been getting ready for their return journey. The short-legged Cossack and the merchant had already started. They had driven off on their sleighs as soon as the inhabitants of the camp had gone out into the *tundra*.

The other Cossacks and the police officer stuffed the soft skins hastily into the leather sacks, loaded them on to the sleighs, and tied them on tightly with thongs.

As soon as the loading was finished the police officer went into Ermatschyn's tent and came out again shortly afterwards with the priest. Both were wrapped from head to foot in black, grey, and coloured reindeer skins. They mounted the sleighs and the teams got into motion.

The inhabitants of the camp silently watched the Russian train of dog-sleighs make off. The dogs ran faster and faster. It was soon scarcely possible to see their legs moving. Then both dogs and sleighs merged to a dark streak, just like a long boat with human bodies projecting over its edge.

<sup>1</sup> Equivalent to 'Good luck' The words with which the Chukchee Eskimos take leave of their dead

When the sleighs were out of sight and only a small white cloud of mist glimmered in the distance in the direction they had taken, Imteurgin, Karawja, and Pelpell made their way to the black tent of Ermatschyn.

Ermatschyn was sitting there in a very bad temper. The Tsar's water had given him a headache.

'Give me back my reindeer,' said Imteurgin, sitting down near the lamp.

Ermatschyn was chewing a small piece of hard snow and rubbing his forehead.

'Your reindeer were all eaten up yesterday.'

Imteurgin stared at him, then at Karawja and Pelpell, and said.

'I dare say they were, but give me others.'

'He's right,' said Karawja and Pelpell both together. 'Give him others.'

'He can take some if he likes,' said Ermatschyn. 'It doesn't worry me. But I tell you all his reindeer were eaten up yesterday.'

Ermatschyn rose, took a long, curved pipe, with copper decorations on it, from the wall, stuffed a whole leaf of tobacco in it, and began to smoke.

He took a pull at the pipe, then another, spat, and handed the pipe to Imteurgin.

'Have a smoke. That's Tsar's grass.'

Imteurgin took the pipe reluctantly, sucked at it, and gave it back to Ermatschyn.

Ermatschyn pressed down the tobacco in the pipe with his fingers and went on smoking without offering it again.

He smoked for a long time. Sometimes he drew in the smoke, sometimes he let it out through his nostrils, moved the pipe from one corner of his mouth to the other, coughed, and spat.

Then he knocked the ashes out of his pipe into the palm of his hand and shot them into his mouth.

'We all ate up your reindeer at the common banquet,' said Ermatschyn when he had swallowed the ashes, 'on the feast day. But I'll give you some more.'

Imteurgin nodded his head.

At that moment the bearskin at the entrance to the tent was lifted and the *shaman* entered. He sat down next to Ermatschyn.

'Well, they've gone,' said he. 'They were wicked men, that lot. I hope we shan't see the one with the long hair again.'

No one answered. Every one sat still, looking at the ground. Then Ermatschyn silently handed the *shaman* the pipe. The *shaman* began to pull at it with closed eyes.

'Shall we go and get the reindeer?' asked Karawja.

'Right,' said Ermatschyn. 'Let us go.' He put his hand on the edge of the bed of skins and hoisted himself slowly up.

The *shaman* took the pipe out of his mouth.

'Where are you going?' he asked Ermatschyn.

'To my herd. Imteurgin wants some reindeer.'

'Reindeer? His reindeer are up in the sky now,' said the *shaman*. 'They are with Kutuwja. I put all the antlers next to Kutuwja.'

'Perfectly right, as you say,' agreed Ermatschyn, lowering himself on to the bed again.

Imteurgin, Karawja, and Pelpell looked at one another. Then they all got up together and left the tent in silence.

Imteurgin and Karawja went in one direction. Pelpell in another.

'Well, if he won't give us any reindeer, you and I had better travel together,' observed Karawja to Imteurgin.

'No,' Imteurgin answered. 'I shall travel alone.'

'But, neighbour, you have so few reindeer now. How will you be able to travel now?'

'It is true that I only have a few reindeer, but for that reason I shall go hunting. And my son Kutuwja will help me with my hunting from above.'

They drew near Karawja's tent.

'Tyllim!' called Karawja.

A head was thrust out of the tent.

'Tyllim, harness the reindeer. My two



for Imteurgin, your two for Rultu, and two more for Kuch. They want to travel alone.'

'*E-ee!*' exclaimed Tyllim. 'Coming directly.'

While the men harnessed the reindeer the women took down the tent and loaded it on to the sled with the other things. Then they all sat down on the edge of the hollow where the tent had stood and put on their fur caps and big fur gloves.

Imteurgin caught hold of Kuch's elbow and asked:

'Perhaps we had better leave Neusskat here?'

Kuch rubbed her sleeve over her eyes.

'Yes, let her stay here.'

'Karawja'—Imteurgin turned to his neighbour—'take Neusskat. Let her grow up with you.'

Karawja's wife took Neusskat by the arm and carried her into the tent. Neusskat pressed her head to the woman's shoulder and burst out crying.

The teams began to move.

Tyllim and Karawja followed them.

They accompanied Imteurgin's train of sleds as far as the end of the camp and there stood still.

'We'll meet at the Horned Lake next spring,' said Imteurgin.

'Good!' replied Karawja. 'Until next

spring I shall be travelling round the Navel Lake.'

As the teams started on again Kuch leant over the edge of the sled, turned her head, and called:

'Feed Neusskat well, neighbour. She must grow up quickly.'

For the rest of the winter Imteurgin travelled along the edge of the forest, hunting. But animals and birds were all sleeping, deep in the snow. Carrying his lance in his hand and his traps on his back he wandered for days among the low-hanging branches of the trees, which were laden heavily with snow, rummaging among the bushes, grubbing in the snow-drifts, but could see no trace of any animals.

Snow lay everywhere, swept smooth by the wind, even and clean.

'It's a bad world,' Imteurgin grumbled to himself. 'Not a hare, not a ptarmigan to be seen. How ever are we going to live?'

Kuch broke up old dried reindeer bones with a hammer, cooked them, and managed to support the family on the broth she made.

When they were all dizzy with hunger Imteurgin slaughtered one of the draught reindeer.

They ate the meat and their eyes grew clear again.

Kuch cut up the reindeer, separating the ribs, shoulder-blades, backbone, neck, head,

and feet from one another and laying them all in a hollow in the snow. She poured the blood into the stomach, which was still full of undigested moss, squeezed the dung out of the intestines, and buried them too.

For a long time after that there was enough to eat. Every day Kuch extracted a piece of frozen meat from the hollow and cooked it.

And Imteurgin wandered on, day by day, along the edge of the forest and found nothing. The animals were still lying deep in their holes.

When the meat was all finished Kuch exhumed the intestines, cut them up small, and cooked them. Next day she hashed up the stomach piecemeal and made soup of it.

That day Imteurgin did not come back to the tent until late in the evening. His feet were swollen by his long journey and the world swam before his eyes.

The family sat down by the lamp. Kuch served up a reindeer skull containing a broth made of the moss which had been in the reindeer's stomach, blood, and tiny pieces of the stomach itself.

Imteurgin ladled out a little of the broth, tasted it, and poured it, shutting his eyes tight, into his mouth. Then he took another ladleful, then another. Suddenly he rushed out of the tent and began to stuff snow into his mouth.

'Food's bad,' he muttered, stamping about.

This broth kept the family alive for a few days, then they went hungry again.

Another reindeer was slaughtered.

'There are only a few reindeer left now,' said Imteurgin to his wife. 'Fewer than the fingers of one hand. How ever are we going to live now?'

'Perhaps we had better try to find some people to help us,' Kuch said.

'That's right. I'll go and try to find some.'

He harnessed two reindeer, tied the other two to the back of the sled, and drove out into the wide *tundra* to look for people.

## CHAPTER XII

### YOUR FATHER WAS A GREAT MAN

**I**MTEURGIN drove his sled all day long. He did not stop till towards evening, when there were no more trees and bushes to be seen on his way.

He unharnessed the reindeer and tethered them with a long leather thong. The reindeer burrowed in the snow and cropped the crisp white moss. Imteurgin hollowed out a hole in the snow, drew his cap far down his face, and crawled into the hollow.

It was warmer under the snow than outside. Imteurgin slept for a time. Then his hands and feet grew numb with the cold. He crept out of the hollow and began hopping about. He jumped first on one foot then on the other. Sometimes he jumped like a hare, both feet together, sometimes like an elk, throwing out one foot behind the other.

When he was a little warmer he buried himself in the snow again. He crouched there with his legs folded under him till daybreak.

Then he harnessed the reindeer again and drove on.

He passed among bushes laden with snow, round high snow hillocks, and by the rare trees of the *tundra*.

After he had spent two more nights in the snow without a fire he froze completely.

His clothing became covered with a thick crust of ice. Prickly hoar-frost coated his cap, collar, and fur jerkin. He grew steadily bulkier and heavier. White patches spread over his clothing in all directions.

The ice penetrated his mittens, his furred stockings and his fur jerkin, and pricked his skin like needles.

Imteurgin crawled down from the sled with difficulty and tried to run. But his knees were quite stiff. He was only able to take a few steps with great difficulty and soon threw himself back on to the sled again.

He struck his hands and feet forcibly against the edge of the sled as he lay, but they were so numb with cold that he could not feel anything.

Imteurgin gave up the struggle and lay still.

After a time he lifted his head and looked round. The *tundra* stretched white all around him. There was neither tent nor smoke to be seen.

The snow-covered earth seemed to rise like a vault into the heavens and become one with them.

'I shall soon be frozen quite stiff,' thought

Imteurgin. 'I shan't find any people now either.'

Suddenly the reindeer threw up their heads, snorted, and galloped off at a frantic speed.

'Wolves!' was the thought that shot through Imteurgin's head. 'It's near Belly Lake, this, where there are no people and many wolves.'

But the reindeer were now trotting on trampled snow.

Imteurgin rubbed his eyes, tore the icicles from his eyebrows and lashes, and saw smoke.

There were two tents standing quite near. There was one large tent made of long-haired black reindeer-skin and another green one next to it. A fat grey dog with black withers appeared between the tents, snarling ferociously.

'Those are Ermatschyn's tents,' said Imteurgin to his reindeer. 'I'm not going to lodge with Ermatschyn!'

He tugged at the reins, struck at his team with a leathern thong, and drove past the tents.

There were soon no further traces of men or reindeer. The sled was again driving across crisp, untouched snow.

'Who can be living with Ermatschyn now?' thought Imteurgin. 'Tawrinwat? I'm not going to lodge with Tawrinwat either.'

Cold gripped Imteurgin again. Icicles

were again hanging from his eyelashes and eyebrows.

Suddenly he saw tracks

Where did they come from?

For the second time there was a smell of smoke in the *tundra*.

Imteurgin shouted at the reindeer and drove them in the direction of the smoke.

There were two tents standing quite near. There was one large tent made of long-haired black reindeer-skin and another green one next to it. A fat grey dog with black withers appeared between the tents, snarling ferociously.

'So you turned back did you, you brutes!' cried Imteurgin to the reindeer. 'You wanted a rest did you? Bringing me back to Ermatschyn——'

He tried to turn the reindeer, but they would not obey the reins. They began to cough and paw the snow.

Imteurgin got down from the sled and threw the reins on the ground.

'Have a good rest,' he said to the reindeer. 'I'll just go and warm my hands at Ermatschyn's fire, shake the frost off my jerkin, and then we'll go on again.'

At the entrance to the tent the dog rushed at Imteurgin and bit him in the leg. Imteurgin gave him a hard kick backwards and entered.

The plump woman with the thick black



plaits helped Imteurgin to take off his cap, his boots, and his jerkin. She knocked off the ice on his clothes with a stick and hung them up to dry. Then she handed the guest tea and cooked meat.

The hot tea thawed Imteurgin's body. His arms and legs grew flabby, and without finishing the meat he collapsed in his place and went to sleep.

He did not wake until the following morning

Ermatschyn sat in the corner of the tent nearest the entrance. He held a reindeer bone in his hand. He slashed it with a knife, broke it in two, and sucked out the marrow.

'*Yatti.*' he inquired, handing Imteurgin the bone.

'*E-ee,*' Imteurgin blurted out. 'I had a good journey.'

He seized the bone in both hands and sucked the rich marrow greedily.

The woman served them with a hot meal in Russian vessels. They each swallowed two reindeer's tongues and an enormous piece of reindeer breast as well. Then they drank thirty cups of tea, eating a helping of frozen liver to each cup.

When the meal was over they filled their pipes.

'Enjoying your travels?' asked Ermatschyn.

'My travelling is bad,' Imteurgin replied. 'I have no luck these days.'

Ermatschyn shook his head and drew strongly at his pipe. Then he asked:

'Perhaps you need reindeer?'

'E-ee. I do need reindeer.'

'I have many reindeer.'

They both smoked another pipe.

Ermatschyn took Imteurgin by the arm and said:

'Let us be neighbours. You are a good herdsman.'

'E-ee,' said Imteurgin. He got up

He left the tent and went to look for his reindeer.

They were not far off, near Ermatschyn's herd. All four were a remarkable contrast to the others. They were lean and jaded, their ribs stuck out plainly, their flanks had fallen in quite flat, their backs were bent. One of them, the weakest, was lying on the snow, just moving its antlers feebly.

Imteurgin gave the reindeer a second look and walked slowly back to the tent.

'Right,' said he to Ermatschyn, 'let us be neighbours. But first we shall have to go and fetch my tent.'

'I'll go with you,' said Ermatschyn. 'I'll harness the fastest of my reindeer.'

After Imteurgin's departure the women lived on what remained of the meat and the intestines.

'This is the worst time we have ever

known,' said Kuch to Rultu. 'We had two men before. Now we have none.'

'Your man will come back,' Rultu answered. 'But mine is living far away from me. He was killed by those wicked men, Ermatschyn's guests.'

She wept, and wiped her eyes with her rough, hairy sleeve.

Even the remnants of the meat were soon finished. For two days the women ate nothing. They went continually out into the *tundra*, laid their ears against the snow, and listened.

Perhaps reindeer-sled runners might become audible not far off. But there was no sound of hoofs to be heard. They went back into the tent, built a big fire in the middle of it, and told their fortune by reindeer bones. Would Imteurgin return or not, and what would he bring with him?

They stretched a dried-up shoulder-blade over the fire and bent over it, whispering:

'Shoulder-blade, shoulder-blade, you have travelled far, you have seen much and you are very wise. Tell us, whither drives our Elder? Split at the top if he is driving away from us, split at the bottom if he is driving towards us. If his sled is full, split deep. If he has met with misfortune, split right across.'

The shoulder-blade turned steadily blacker and cracked in the heat. The women

watched every crevice in it attentively and whispered:

'He has met with misfortune; the crevice is spreading right across.'

'Perhaps he has crossed the trail of a stranger?'

'Perhaps he did cross a trail. But it was a bad trail, that is certain. It will be long before our Elder returns to us. We shall have to try and find something to eat ourselves.'

On the third day Kuch cut up the flat piece of leather upon which their meals were served, roasted it at the fire, and threw it into the pot.

When the water in the pot began to boil she poured the broth into the reindeer skull and said:

'Let us eat this. At least it will fill our stomachs.'

The women sipped the bitter broth, which smelt strongly of burnt leather.

'We must feed my son,' said Kuch. 'And the dog too.'

Rultu filled a big bone ladle with the broth and gave it to the dog.

He lapped up all the liquid in the ladle greedily, spilling some of it.

Kuch fed the baby from her own mouth. Teu turned his head and swallowed the bitter fluid and the small, slippery pieces of cooked leather in it, hiccoughing noisily.

The family lived on this broth for two days. When they had drunk the last drop of it the women covered the embers of the fire with ashes and laid the baby down on the skin-bed. They tied the dog up near the child and went out into the *tundra*.

They walked over the plain, sinking up to their knees in the snow. Rultu held a knife in her hand. Kuch had a chopper stuck in her belt.

The women approached a tree. Kuch struck it with her chopper and leapt back. Snow fell from the tree, at first in heavy lumps, then in a dense shower of small particles.

As soon as the snow-dust had settled the women again drew near the tree and began to tear off the bark.

'I've found something!' Rultu suddenly cried out joyfully. She carefully detached a frozen white worm with a black head from a piece of bark. The women broke the worm into two pieces and gobbled it up ravenously.

Then they made a further search for worms. When they had stripped all the bark off the first tree, they made for a second, a third, and a fourth. It was not until towards evening, when it became impossible to perceive the white worms on the bark, that they returned to the tent.

They stood for a time in front of it, shaking the snow off their clothing.

Then they listened. The baby was not crying. It was perfectly silent in the tent.

'I can't hear anything,' said Kuch. 'You listen. Perhaps the child is crying.'

'No,' said Rultu, 'the child is not crying. Perhaps it is asleep.'

'Or the dog may have eaten it, perhaps?'

The women rushed into the tent and lifted up the partition. The bitch was lying on the bed of skins, next to little Teu. The child, smacking its lips loudly, was sucking one of the animal's teats. Kuch ran to her son and dragged him away from the bitch. Teu began to bawl and kick. He thrust his legs against his mother and strained towards the bitch.

Kuch gave him the breast. But the child threw back its head and screamed still louder.

'My breast is quite empty,' said Kuch. And she put the baby back next to the bitch.

The women sat over the fire the whole evening, cooking worms and eating the dark broth. The child slept beside the bitch.

Next day they went out again into the *tundra*. Close to the tent they perceived the tracks of a small animal. It looked as if some one had been strewing pearls in the snow.

The women followed the tracks and came to a small hole. They scraped away some of the snow and caught sight of two tiny black eyes. It was a mouse! Rultu struck

the mouse across the head with the handle of her knife and thrust the animal into the breast of her fur jerkin. The women went on burrowing deeper and deeper in the snow, striking the hard earth and the ice-coated moss with the chopper. At the bottom of the hole they found a pile of roots, mushrooms, and berries.

'That's the mouse's larder,' said Kuch. 'Mice always collect food for the winter, so as not to go hungry.'

'It's good food,' said Rultu, biting the frozen roots. 'Let us take the thick roots for our Elder and the berries for Teu. The mouse has collected a lot of moss-berries.'

'E-ee,' agreed Kuch. 'That's right, what you say. We'll keep the biggest roots for our Elder.'

When the women came back to the tent they saw big, fat reindeer harnessed to new, broad sleds. They perceived from the look of the reindeer that they had only just come to a halt. They were eating snow greedily and their legs were still quivering.

'Those are not our reindeer,' said Kuch. 'They are strangers. Perhaps they have brought news of our Elder?'

'There is a smell of meat cooking,' Rultu added.

They entered the tent.

A big fire was burning there. In front of it sat Imteurgin and Ermatschyn. They



AN OLD CHUCKCHEE  
CONSIDERED ESPECIALLY HANDSOME BY THE NATIVES



were smoking and staring at the pot, in which reindeer-meat was being cooked.

'We've been waiting for you,' said Imteurgin to the women. 'Let us eat meat.'

They ate in silence. The women chewed the meat with closed eyes, swallowing it in tiny morsels.

'They're very hungry, that's clear,' said Imteurgin.

When the pot was empty Imteurgin rose and said to Kuch:

'Take down the tent'

'Where are we going?' asked Kuch.

'To Ermatschyn's.'

Kuch and Rultu looked first at Imteurgin, then at Ermatschyn, and began slowly to roll up the bed of skins.

Then Kuch went to Teu, took him in her arms, and said:

'Up with you. We are going to travel far. We are going to live with strangers now.'

Thenceforward Imteurgin acted as Ermatschyn's herdsman. He set up his tent behind his master's and added his four reindeer to Ermatschyn's herd.

He seldom entered his own tent. The reindeer had cropped all the moss round about the tents and now grazed far out in the *tundra*, where a great deal of untouched moss still lay under the loose, untrodden snow.

Imteurgin watched the herd day and night.

Only Kuch, the little Teu, and the dog now remained in the tent. Rultu did not live there any longer. Rultu had become Ermatschyn's second wife.

Kuch talked to the child, rocking it in her arms.

'You are all we have now. And once there were many of us and we had our own reindeer too. Your father was a great man. He was the best hunter in the *tundra*. And now your father is herdsman to a stranger. Your sister Neusskat lives with our neighbour Karawja. Your brother Kutuwja was killed by Ermatschyn's guests. And Rultu lives in the big tent. She hangs Ermatschyn's stockings up to dry.'

